

The Gift of Christmas

For Michael

with love

from his grandmother,

Marya Seovel

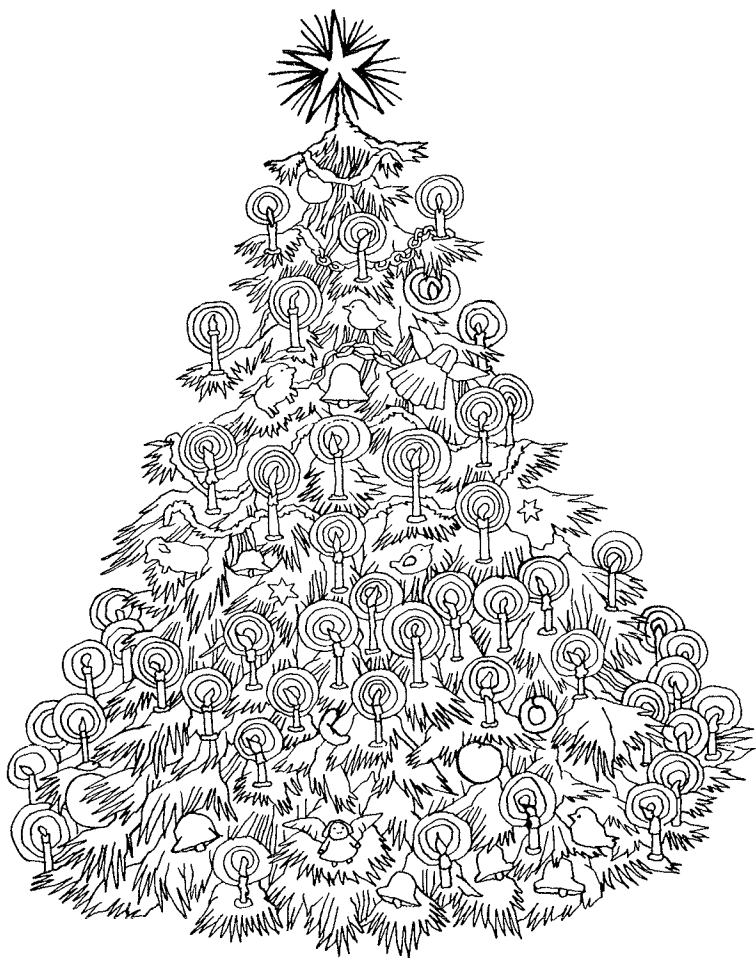
*Also by Myra Scovel*

The Chinese Ginger Jars

Richer by India

To Lay a Hearth

The Happiest Summer





# The Gift of Christmas



MYRA SCOVEL

DRAWINGS BY SUSAN PERL

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For F.

What if it *had* been  
chocolates!

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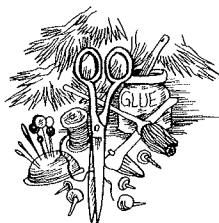
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The  
Gift  
of  
Christmas

## **The Gift of Christmas**

Are you not content  
to wear out men's patience?  
Must you also wear out  
the patience of . . . God?  
Therefore the Lord himself  
shall give you a sign:  
A young woman is with child,  
and she will bear a son,  
and will call him Immanuel.  
(That is, God is with us.)

Isaiah 7:13, 14

God was in Christ  
reconciling the world  
to himself.

2 Corinthians 5:19

# ONE

Christmas at the home of the man with whom I had fallen in love was having its embarrassing moments. To begin with, the whole situation was iffy. Frederick Gilman Scovel, medical student, and I, Supervisor of Obstetrics in the Cortland County Hospital in his home town, certainly had something going between us. We talked about life as if we were facing it together. I had accepted the premise.

Fred was everything I'd hoped for and was afraid I'd never find: brown-haired, brown-eyed, six feet one and a half inches tall. Was he wondering how he would look with a wife a smidge over five feet high? I doubted it. How he looked never seemed to enter his head; yet he was aware of everything around him—chickadees in a lilac bush, fog coming in over the courthouse, a frond of fern. He was the kind of a man who might wake you up at dawn so you wouldn't miss the spectacular sunrise.

If he had any such ideas, so far he hadn't voiced them. True, there had been that night on the hill . . . But had he actually proposed? I couldn't be sure. The thought did not add to my comfort on this Christmas Eve of 1928.

Fred and I and his mother and father were skirting the edges of conversation, fumbling to know how to act toward one another. If I had been a stranger, I could have been taken into this home as a member of the family on Christmas Eve or on any other convenient or inconvenient time of year. But who knew? Would I become the daughter of this house or wouldn't I?

I dreaded the opening of presents next day, wondering whether or not the gift I had for him was too ostentatious for this stage in our relationship. I had had such fun buying "expensive" things, now that I had a job and my own money. The job had brought us together; Fred had spent a summer vacation working in the hospital laboratory. But that had been a year and a half ago. We had been separated from each other for long periods of time—he continuing at Cornell Medical College in New York City and I in a postgraduate course in pediatrics at Babies and Children's Hospital, Cleveland, Ohio. If Fred felt that I was just someone to pal around with when he was home on vacation, that silver-backed, hand-engraved brush and comb set was entirely out of place and it was too late to do anything about it.

I had worked myself up to a high pitch and there were still more of his relatives here for the Christmas holidays—Uncle Arthur, an inveterate tease, I'd been warned (teasing seemed to have been handed down to all the male members of this family); and Cousin Dwight, his suave, handsome, black-haired son.

Up to now, both of them had been very quiet. Aunt Katherine, wife and mother, had died and this was their first Christmas without her. How must they feel? I wondered, look-

ing at them across the table; lonelier than ever in this happy household where the Christmas celebration was going on as usual. What could I say to these strangers trying so bravely to enter into the festivities? Would they someday be my family?

The conversation flowed along, Fred's mother graciously explaining who people were as they were mentioned. His father kept urging me to eat more and more of the delectable food, and when I had to refuse third helpings in favor of breathing, he and Uncle Arthur made remarks to each other about how sad it was that I did not like Fred's mother's cooking.

Though I had known when I first entered this house that it was the kind of a home I'd always dreamed of having, and though I was enjoying every minute of the soft linen damask, the old silver, the Royal Crown Derby plates "used for very special guests," I suddenly wanted to escape this trying to cope. I wanted to be my own parents' child, small Myra Scott of Mechanicville, New York, with her own brothers and sisters on Christmas morning.

I could feel the cold on my nose as I first peeked out from under the covers. Snow had drifted through the inch of open window. It was still dark, but surely it must be morning. Hark! Wasn't that a bird chirping? Or was it Daddy stirring in bed? Neither. There was no sound from the room of our parents—no sound from Bob's and Jim's room; no sound from our two little sisters. I'd have to wait; it might even be hours. Then the pat of quick footsteps coming off the porch next door, the squeak of snow getting louder as the sound passed our house. Mrs. Dalton was on her way to Mass! It must be six o'clock! "*Merry Christmas, everybody!*"

"Oh, no, please. Not yet," from our Mother; then a sleepy yawn-of-a-"Merry-Christmas" from our father. We jumped out of bed and pounded down the hall to our parents' bedroom. We were not allowed to go downstairs until Daddy had found out whether or not Santa Claus had come (actually to light the candles on the tree). It took forever. Maybe Santa Claus *hadn't* come. We half-worried, half-knew that nothing that bad could

possibly happen on Christmas Day. At last we heard the longed-for assurance, "Well, it looks as if the Old Man has made it again this year."

An explosion of footsteps burst from the top landing, boomed down the stairs, and rumbled into the living room. What could be in all those packages? . . .

"All I want for Christmas is a pair of black pajamas."

It was Cousin Dwight and I was stunned back to the present by such an absurd idea. Nobody in our town had ever seen black underwear or black pajamas. We had heard of them, of course, but couldn't imagine "nice" people wearing them. I should say something to cover my lapse of attention.

"I can't imagine waking up at night and looking down on black pajamas" was what came out.

"Nobody's asking you to, my dear," said Cousin Dwight.

There was a spontaneous burst of laughter from the men. Even Fred's mother allowed herself one little run and a trill before composing her features into shocked silence, a silence which spread around the table in seconds. My face must have been the color of the poinsettias in the centerpiece. Fred squeezed my hand. His father burst into the breach with "Have another sliver of this steak, Arthur. How about you, Dwight? Louise, are there any more of your delicious rolls in the kitchen?"

Would I ever get through this Christmas Eve? To say nothing of Christmas morning and what used to be the exciting ritual of gift-giving!

The moment I had so dreaded arrived. Fred had opened my gift to him and everyone had ohed and ahed at the silver-backed brush and comb. "Much too good to use," Fred had said. "I'll keep it to look at, to remember this day." Now he chose a package from under the tree, walked across the room, gave it to me, and went back and sat down. Why this silence

in the room, without even a swish of tissue paper? Why was every pair of eyes fixed on me?

"Open it," said Fred.

I took all the time I dared to untie the string and unfold the paper. At last, in my lap lay a one-pound box of Fannie Farmer's chocolates. I managed a weak smile and a more fervent (I hoped!) "Thank-you-you-know-I-love-Fannie-Farmer's."

"Why not open it now?" asked Fred.

"Yes, why not open it and pass it around?" added Cousin Dwight.

"Fannie Farmer's at this hour of the morning?" I hedged.

"There'll never be a better moment than this one," said Fred.

Well, if they wanted chocolates they could have them. I ripped off the cover and was about to thrust the whole thing into Fred's hands and disappear when I saw that the box was filled with tissue paper. In the center lay—Oh! a ring box edged with gold. I was going to cry, I knew it and looked up at Fred frantically. He crossed the room again, this time in one stride, picked up the candy box and took me by the hand.

"Come on, let's get out of here," he said.

Upstairs in his small study he slipped the glowing ring on the fourth finger of my left hand. It was a diamond, set in platinum—a ring more beautiful than any girl had ever worn. It was all the Christmases past and all the Christmases to come.

Mother Scovel served hot spiced orange juice to friends dropping in at the manse during the Christmas season. Here is her recipe:

### HOT SPICED ORANGE JUICE

2 quarts orange juice

1 cup tea

1 teaspoon cinnamon } in a cloth bag

1 teaspoon cloves }

2 cups sugar



Bring to a boil, then continue to boil for 20 minutes. Remove bag of spices. Serve with small squares of fruit cake. (We serve it in mugs, usually.)



The  
Spirit  
of  
Christmas  
Past

## TWO

I had a lot to learn about the Birthday of the Christ Child and China was a good place to learn it. You don't usually celebrate with gusto the birthday of someone you know very little about. The better you know a person and the closer you are to him, the more fun it is to plan the little surprises and make the preparations for a birthday he will enjoy.

We sailed for China in 1930 with our three-month-old baby, James Kiehle Scovel. Following a year of language study in Peking, we spent five years working in a hospital in Tsining, a city in the interior of Shantung Province. There, two more children were born—Carl Robert, in 1932, and Anne Elizabeth, in 1933.

I came to believe that for me really to celebrate the Birthday of Christ, His birth had to mean as much to me as the birth of a child into our own family (which is never simply a matter of cake and candles and gifts once a year). We accept

the responsibilities the child's coming brings, rearrange our lives to devote ourselves more fully to him. We try to learn more and more about what his coming means, not only to our family, but to his world.

As the years go by, we find that not much of our life is what we planned it would be. But because of the child's coming, each day has been richer. There has been someone at hand when the going was rough, someone to laugh with at life's unexpected surprises. There have been difficulties we wish with all our hearts we could have avoided. There have been marvelous adventures we never could have dreamed would be ours. Above all, we know we are loved. Someone who believes in us, wants us and needs us. We can't help feeling we are very important people—at least to the child, and who else matters?

So each year we recall the mystery of his birth and the change his coming has made in us, in our world. We want to give him such a celebration as he has never seen before! We want to bring everyone we know into that circle of wonder, warmth, and love.

And since our Chinese friends shared with us *their* biggest festival, Chinese New Year, bringing us gifts and trays of specially prepared cakes and tiny meat dumplings to be steamed and later fried, so *we* entertained with our special traditions of Christmas and gave some small gift to each member of the hospital staff, to student nurses, and to other friends.

In China there were fewer distractions from the central theme of Christmas. They called it "The Day of the Holy Birth." In our city there were no department stores, no tinsel, no baubles, no neon-light Santa Clauses. No radios crashed continuous carols into the quiet streets where the sound of even one motor vehicle was a rarity.

But on that day Christians and other-than-Christians poured

into the lavishly decorated church to sing the familiar hymns and carols, to listen to the special music of the choir, to hear again the old story of Christmas told by their fine young pastor. Or just to see what the glad celebration was all about.

Since it was all in Chinese, we were pleased that we could now understand it.

(We didn't know anyone who spoke English except our family of missionaries—we Presbyterians in the South Suburb and the Southern Baptists in the city; Sister Toni, a Swiss nurse in the North Suburb, and the Wienekes, a German family not far from her. We conversed in Chinese with our German friends in the Roman Catholic monastery and convent at Tai Chia Chuang, six miles north of Tsining, since neither of us understood the other's language.)

We Americans would gather at one of the homes in either the Baptist or Presbyterian compound later on Christmas Day to feast on the traditionals (or "a reasonable facsimile" thereof) and to exchange gifts, lovingly wrapped in the same paper some one of us had used the year before, and the year before that and the year before that. New paper, appearing on the gifts of the family just back from furlough, was passed around for all to admire.

Even the gifts themselves sometimes reappeared. Never a Christmas came and went without our recalling the episode of the argyle socks which, not being all black or brown or blue or gray, were never worn, but passed from man to man, year after year, until the Christmas when they landed in the lap of Frank Connely, who had started them off in the first place. He opened the package with a hoot. "I've watched these go around year after year and knew I'd get them back someday. I'm going to wear them," he said. And he did!

Christmas preparations began in July when Fred took the children and me out to the coast to escape the heat. We did

the bulk of our buying for the year at that time—grocery staples, household supplies, yarn for the winter knitting, and so forth. Over the years our Tsining stores gradually carried more imports such as coffee, spool thread, toothpaste, and the like. But Christmas shopping was still done in summer. When we could afford a special gift for each child from Montgomery Ward, the orders were sent at that time, too. There were, of course, no air flights to China, and the long sea journey, plus the usual delays from the disruptions of war, might hold up the packages for months.

Thanksgiving Day was my deadline for having all the presents bought, wrapped, and “hidden” in the Christmas trunk. Who knew who might come down with measles between then and Christmas? Besides, it left me free to plan the parties for the staff, the student nurses, the doctors and their families, and to enjoy the children’s preparations for Christmas—making cookies, “helping” the cook do the fruit cake, making the floating candles for their mission “aunts” and “uncles,” and walking into the city to find “something special for Daddy.” A second trip with their father was required, which I, of course, knew nothing about.

Each year we all went by ricksha to the Catholic school and church in the city, then on to the monastery at Tai Chia Chuang to see the beautiful crèches with almost life-size figures. The children would stand in awe as they were allowed to touch the Christ Child. The figures in the crèche in the city church had been made in Germany by a brother of one of the nuns. We marveled at how they had ever made the journey to China without a tiny chip or crack.

It wasn’t customary, then, for Protestants to have a crèche in their homes, but Fred and I wanted one. We thought it would help to remind us that the Manger, and not the Christmas tree, was the center of our celebration. We two will never forget the year Fred’s mother gave us ours.

This is how we made the gifts the children gave to the mission "aunts" and "uncles":

### HOW TO MAKE FLOATING CANDLES

Collect all candle stubs during the year  
or buy cakes of paraffin wax



Also needed are:

1 box of colored crayons (We used very inexpensive wax ones found in the Chinese market.)

Several tin jello molds (Ours were star-shaped.)

A few empty cans

An old chopstick, *wooden*, not plastic

Two-to-three-inch lengths of rather thick, loosely woven cotton string to be used for wicks, or buy candle wicking

Melt the candles in separate cans over boiling water.

Add a small piece of crayon the color desired to each can.

Stir with the wooden chopstick till all the color has melted.

Add more color if needed. When the mixture is smooth and the wax has entirely melted, pour into jello molds.

Watch rather carefully to see when the wax has set enough to hold the wick; then insert it. Be sure the wax is liquid underneath and has only a little scum on top. Be sure the wick goes down to the very bottom of the mold.

When cold, turn out of mold and wrap for Christmas.

If you want to give a somewhat larger gift, set them in a small porcelain bowl with instructions to add water, a few floating leaves or blossoms, and use as a centerpiece for the Christmas table.

# THREE

We left China in 1936 for a year of furlough and study in America. Before we were ready to return, the Sino-Japanese War was in its early stages but had not yet reached Shantung. We hoped that before that happened the war would be over. Now I, who had had qualms about going to China with one small baby in the first place, found myself praying that the way would open for us to return to our home in Tsining with three, aged three, five, and seven. We had also persuaded Fred's mother to make her home with us. Father Scovel, whom I loved so very much, had died the year Carl was born. Mother was alone and we wanted her with us.

The prayers for our return to China were answered, and we started out full of hope.

Who, on that happy Christmas Day of 1928, when Fred and I became engaged, could have pictured us in the port city

of Tsingtao on December 22, 1937, preparing to drive cross-country on a 700-mile trip in a Ford truck-to-become-ambulance, straight into what might well turn out to be the line of battle?

"If this is the right thing to do, it will be right all the way," we had told our friends in America who had protested our leaving the United States. "We have to take the first step into the water before the Red Sea will part." It turned out to be somewhat more of a sea than I had envisaged.

We'd been stopped in Japan, Fred only being allowed to go on to China since he was needed in his hospital to care for the scores of wounded soldiers both Chinese and Japanese. Eventually, Mother and I and the children had been able to obtain passage from Japan to Tsingtao, on the coast of our own province. We had taken a house and had planned to remain there until we were sure it was safe to proceed to our home in Tsining. Fred would come out to the coast to be with us for Christmas if it were at all possible; but he would have to return to his work within two or three days.

On the night of his arrival in Tsingtao we were both awakened by a strong compulsion to get up, take the family and leave the city. We were all to go at once to Tsining. At first we were embarrassed even to speak of this inner urging, neither of us being accustomed to such experiences.

"It's just plain silly," I said when the compulsion became too strong to ignore. "You're worn out from your trip getting here. You certainly can't turn around and go back without some rest. And who in his right mind would even consider taking Mother and the children on such a journey?"

As we talked it over later, we both knew we had to do it. And Mother, courageous soul that she was, agreed, even though it meant she might have to stay in Tsingtao alone, unable, perhaps, even to hear from us. We were not happy about leaving her behind. The command, if such it could be called,



had included "all of us," but we were not sure she could stand such a trip.

Miraculously, we learned of a special train leaving Tsingtao the next night, and we arranged to have her travel with two members of our mission family, Mary Stewart and Helen Christman, who had been trying in vain to get back to Tsining and hadn't heard about the train until we phoned. Fred then wired to Deane and Stella Walter, evangelists in our mission station, asking them to meet the party at Yenchowfu by car (one of the few cars in all the area). Our branch railway was not running. That special train, we learned later, was the last one to leave Tsingtao for many months.

The next morning the rest of the family piled into the truck with all our things, including an old-fashioned coal stove, which we could not buy in Tsining and which we needed badly. It was December 23. We might well have to spend Christmas along the way, but we were prepared for such an emergency by a suitcase containing a small Christmas tree and a gift for each child, wrapped and ready for any celebration we might be able to produce.

The storefronts of Tsingtao were still boarded up for the night as we started out. Vendors of steaming gruel and crisp crullers were catching the first straggle of customers. Outside the city, day was just beginning to break over the flat countryside where the world was only an inch of brown field against a horizon of vast sky. This was going to be fun.

Fun? Memories of that trip are snatches of a continuing nightmare. Some of the bridges had been destroyed so we had to go through a winding river eight times, never knowing for sure how deep the water was, or if there were any holes in the bottom. One bridge we crossed was only as wide as the inner rear wheels of our six-wheeled truck, so that we bumped over the piles which held it.

We spent the first night with Katherine Hand at Ichowfu,

another of our mission stations. She couldn't have been more surprised if Martians had driven up to her gate. Katherine hadn't seen another American for months. She begged us to stay and have Christmas with her and what a temptation it was! But we knew that Mother would be arriving in Tsining and that she and the others would be anxious about us since we could send no word.

We left early in the morning of the 24th for another series of nightmares. Snow had begun to fall. By dark we found ourselves driving behind a column of soldiers who we thought were Japanese. It seemed wise not to ask, since they paid no attention to us, probably thinking that our truck was a part of their unit, a little late in catching up. Eventually the marching file turned off. Some miles farther, our road ended in the middle of a small village where the truck slithered down into a deep water-buffalo wallow and stopped.

If Katherine Hand had been surprised to see us, what of these villagers who had never seen a white person before? They did not flee, perhaps thinking that people dumb enough to drive into a buffalo wallow wouldn't be capable of doing much harm. In typical village fashion, they gathered, a circle of friends curious to know all about us, enjoying especially the children. "So fat, they are; so white their faces!" "The little one's hair is like gold thread and it's all in circles."

The crowd increased and all but smothered us until a motherly soul elbowed the children and me through the crowd and into her small mudbrick house. At her insistence we took off our shoes and sat or lay on her welcome bed. There we waited and waited and waited. At last Fred came in, but only to tell us that the Japanese Army had commandeered all the animals, so there were no oxen to pull the truck out of the mud. There were no animals in any of the surrounding villages either.

"What are you going to do?" I asked him. His face looked

tired. Pale shadows flickered over it in the firelight from the cauldron where sweet potato soup was on to boil.

"I don't know," he said, "I just don't know." Then quickly, "But don't worry. We'll work out something. I'll be back soon."

As the door closed behind him, that steel rod of courage I'd been holding myself erect with suddenly slid out of my backbone. I collapsed on the bed, sobbing. The children, quiet since our arrival—numb, perhaps—were awestruck to see their mother crying. Small Jim became the man of the family in his father's absence. "Don't cry, Mother," he whispered, patting me awkwardly. "You know you said God would take care of us."

God, and a dear Chinese woman, I thought, in this strange little village that might have been Bethlehem, this room so like the room of His birth. "Thanks, dear," I said to Jim. "God *will* take care of us." I'd forgotten. I'd been thinking we'd have to do it all ourselves. I dried my eyes and got up; and this time I didn't need the cold, steel bar.

Outside we could hear the men singing their work song for the heaviest of jobs. What were they doing? The soup was ready now. "Here, this will help," said our hostess. "You're hungry, that's all. I'll feed the children."

I didn't realize how hungry until the thick soup with delicious soft chunks of sweet potato warmed us through and we began to come alive. "How can we thank you?" I asked.

"*Mei yu shen ma* (It's nothing)," she replied.

What was that? A triumphant shout from outside. We hurried to the door. The truck was on dry ground. The motor was running! Those angels in Chinese padded garments had tied ropes to the front and put their shoulders to the back of the huge vehicle and by sheer man power had pulled and pushed it out of the hole.

"You are about five hours from home," said one of the men.

"But too tired to travel," added the woman. "You must all spend the night here."

Five hours. If all went well, we could be home before day-break. We decided to press on; the children could sleep in the truck.

"But not before the doctor has had his soup," said the woman.

We did our best to express our gratitude, knowing that all our lives we could never repay the debt we owed them.

Aside from having to awaken the magistrate of Yenchowfu to obtain permission to pass through the city gates, the rest of the trip went smoothly. Before dawn on Christmas Day the truck rolled into the mission compound. We were *home* after more than a year away. And the empty, aching weeks of separation from husband and father were past. Whatever happened now would happen to us together, as a family.

It was a morning of miracles, and again the ministration of angels, which may be only another word for friends. The children's grandmother, hearing the truck, came over from her house to greet us. So did "Aunt" Stella Walter, who had opened our place, had it thoroughly cleaned, taken the dishes and linens from the storeroom, made the beds, and—

"Look, Mother! A Christmas tree!" said Carl as we walked into the living room.

Even a Christmas tree! I knelt to unpack the Christmas suitcase and prayed my overwhelming thanks to God as I laid the presents under the beautifully decorated tree—that over-and-above gift of love from a very understanding friend. We were home for Christmas and we could all sleep in our own beds.

Mother had us over for a very late breakfast. Then she gave us the present she had carried with her on her difficult journey on the crowded train. It was a German crèche! Each of the small, exquisitely colored figures was perfect, each face portraying emotion—the Mother, serene; the Shepherds, anxious in their haste; the Wise Men, solemn. Even the animals were expressive. The little donkey with head on one side seemed to

be saying, "What?" The cow, serious, "Hmm. We'll have to look into this." And the Baby—"Look, He's laughing," said Anne. And He would bless our Christmases from this time forth.

Fred came back from the hospital a few days later to tell us he'd just heard the Chinese had begun to plow up the roads over which we had come. "They're planting them with winter wheat," he said, "so the Japanese won't be able to find where the roads were. If we hadn't come when we did, who knows *when* we would have. And I hear Tsingtao has been bombed."

## Wise Men

“You must return by another road,”  
the Wise Men heard God say.  
Another road? The old road  
was the known, the safest way.

But the Kings had been to Bethlehem,  
had knelt as humble men;  
and nothing, after Bethlehem,  
could be the same again.

## FOUR

Three weeks later our city fell to the Japanese. From then until 1943 we lived in the midst of a war that fluctuated in and out of Tsining. Two more children were added to the family during that time—Thomas Scott, in 1939, and Judith Louise, in 1941.

Those were difficult, hungry years, but always we managed to celebrate Christmas; and always with deeper gratitude that we were alive; that we were together; that so far we had been able to obtain enough food to keep us going. Poor as we were, a special halo encircled those Christmases. Fred looks back to the fun he had carving a horse's head from a block of wood, fitting it to a broomstick, gluing on a dashing black mane—a strip from the bottom of my fur coat. It was our gift to Tommy.

And I remember making bookends for Fred by covering two heavy bricks, first with burlap, then with pieces of gold brocade left over from a Chinese jacket, which I sewed around

the burlap tightly. The card read, "Darling, I have never handed you a gold brick before. I hope you will forgive me for these."

Fortunately, there were often books which, when they first arrived, had been too old for the children. These had been stored away in the Christmas trunk. There might be a doll or a doll's bed for the girls. I had started the Christmas trunk early in our married life, after a few lavish Christmases when the children had received far more than they could use or enjoy. I would watch to see which presents they played with most. By the end of the first week, those seldom touched were quietly picked up and stored away. Then on a rainy day, months later, or when one of the children was sick in bed, a new puzzle or a book or a toy would be taken from the trunk and the giver of the present recalled.

But the trunk was not the miraculous pitcher of Baucis and Philemon. There came a time when the wine no longer poured out when it was needed. Orders from Montgomery Ward could not get through, nor could the gifts of friends and relatives in America. We had practically nothing for the children and no money to buy whatever might be found on our city streets. I warned the children that it would be a slim Christmas as far as presents were concerned.

"But what are we going to give to the Baby Jesus?" Anne asked. "It's His Birthday, not ours."

"How would you send it up to heaven, silly?" one of the others asked.

We talked about what might please the Christ Child: "being good"; "not quarreling"; "giving to people who needed things," the answers children give the world over. But I still knew that however happy our Lord would be over such gifts, the children would feel that it wouldn't be Christmas at all if they received no presents.

Well, there were enough scraps to make a rag doll for each



of the girls. An old sweater could be ripped up to make a new one for Tom, with some left over for socks or mittens for Jim and Carl.

And it cost nothing to fix up the cherished old toys, as we did every year so the children wouldn't feel that as soon as a new gift arrived, the old ones could be thrown away. Fred repaired and repainted carts, doll carriages, and toys; I mended, washed, and starched the old doll clothes, sewed on arms or legs, and patched the places where the stuffing had fallen out. The last thing we did on Christmas Eve was to put the old toys in a special place in the living room and line the dolls up along the back of the sofa.

As the years passed, the sofa became fuller and fuller, the dolls less and less recognizable (to any but their owners), but we had sown the wind and had to reap the whirlwind of never being able to throw anything away, even when it came time to pack. And nothing pleased the children more than to run downstairs early Christmas morning to see what was in their stockings, then to play with their renovated toys. Everything new had to wait until after breakfast.

"It won't take long to open the presents this year," I thought as I sewed button eyes on the rag dolls. But this was the Christmas when the Russian fur buyers, "Uncle" Motia and the others, arrived from Tientsin without the red suits but with packs on their backs.

Some years earlier Fred had been called to see "a foreigner" who, he was told, was dying in a warehouse across the Grand Canal. Fred thought there must be some mistake. To our knowledge the only foreigners in Tsining were those in the missions. He hurried to the warehouse and found a White Russian, desperately ill with pneumonia. In those days before antibiotics, nursing care was essential if the man were to live, so Fred brought him home and the children and I nursed him back to health.

From then on, the Russian fur buyers brightened our lives whenever they came to Tsining, not only with piano playing and rollicking songs in Russian (or very sad, beautiful ones), but with feasts of delicacies brought in from Tientsin—zaskuska, Kiev cutlets, piroshkis, desserts, coffee, and, of all undreamed-of things, chocolate bonbons!

Never before had the men appeared in December. What a Christmas it turned out to be, especially for the boys, who received as gifts battleships and guns, the instruments of war their parents would never allow them to have! We *had* to succumb this time, seeing how delighted the Russian “uncles” were at the boys’ enjoyment of their presents. After the Russian friends had left, I explained to the children that their father and I would never buy them guns nor allow *them* to buy such toys. Guns were used to kill; we were people who healed.

The year came when we meant it literally when we prayed, “Give us this day our daily bread.” And as for sugar to make Christmas cookies, there was none of it in the house, none at all. The idea of our traditional fruit cake was so far out of the question it barely entered my head. But no cookies? No gingerbread men? No Santas, bells, or stars made clumsily with dirty cookie dough? We’d have to think of a lot of things to do if the children were to be diverted from making (and eating!) Christmas cookies. Even one cup of sugar, even half a cup, would do.

I had had that much sugar carefully hoarded, but late one cold afternoon, a Japanese officer had called, bringing with him a waif of a girl, one of the young Japanese who had come into the city to cheer the occupation forces. The girls had been in for months now. This one looked so sad and so thin and lonely that I brought out the sugar for their coffee. I measured a meager teaspoonful into each of their cups. As soon as I gave her hers, she ran across the room, took the sugar

bowl in both hands and dumped its entire contents into her coffee which she gulped down ravenously.

"Forget the sugar cookies," I said to myself, knitting furiously one afternoon. It was only a few days before Christmas and I would have to hurry if the doll sweaters were to be finished on time. Chang Ta Ke, our gateman, came in to say that two of the Sisters from the Catholic school were here to wish us a Merry Christmas.

We always loved having the Sisters come. I hid my knitting as Jim, Carl, and Anne came in from their play. Tom and Judy, hearing our voices, asked to get up from their naps. Chao Ta Sao, their second mother (and mine!), had them dressed and downstairs in no time.

Sister Lucentia (whom Fred called Sister Licentious so he could watch her throw back her head and laugh her jubilant laugh) was holding a package on her ample lap. It appeared to be fragile. She waited until the children had gathered around her, then she slowly opened it. I gasped when I saw its contents—thin, crisp sugar cookies; not one or two or even one-apiece for the five of them, but a whole lapful of angels and stars and bells—enough to hang on a tree . . .

"Enough to eat a few while hanging them," said Sister Lucentia, holding the cookies in her skirt as she wriggled out of her chair. "Come, Sister, let's show the children how it's done."

The young Sister, recently arrived from Germany, was already halfway across the room.

After Christmas, when we all went in to see the pageant the girls' school was producing, Mother Superior told me how she had been able to find the sugar and how she had bought it at an "exorbitant price."

"I vowed these Sisters, who have worked so hard and who have gone without so much, would have sugar for Christmas if it took every cent in our deflated treasury," she said. But the Sisters had insisted on using half of it to make the cookies

for our children. "We love them very much, you know," said Mother Superior.

Their love which included sacrifice was the best gift any of us would have that year.

Today, in a country so blessed that most of us take for granted having all the needed ingredients at hand for most anything we want to make, our youngest daughter uses this recipe:

### VICKI'S SUGAR COOKIES

Cream together

1 cup shortening

2 cups sifted sugar

Stir in and mix well

3 eggs

Sift together

4 cups flour

4 teaspoons baking powder

1 teaspoon salt



Gradually add the dry ingredients to the first mixture, stirring well after each cupful. When three cups of the dry ingredients have been added, stir in

2 teaspoons vanilla

then continue to add the dry ingredients, stirring well, until you have a very stiff batter. Try to use all the flour if possible.

Chill dough in refrigerator for at least 12 hours. Then roll out the cookies, between sheets of wax paper, until very thin.

Cut into trees, stars, angels, etc. with Christmas cookie cutters.

Bake in a 350° oven on *greased* tins for about 5 minutes.

Let cool for 2 minutes before removing from the pan carefully, with a spatula. (If you are going to hang the cookies on your Christmas tree, be sure to make a hole for the silk thread to go through before you bake them.)

## FIVE

On March 19, 1943, Fred and I and the children were taken to a Japanese internment camp in Weihsien, Shantung Province. Mother Scovel had returned to America the year before to attend the golden wedding anniversary of her sister and was thus spared the concentration camp experience.

We wondered how many Christmases would pass before we saw her again. But it turned out that we were more fortunate than many others. We were among those chosen for repatriation on the Swedish liner *Gripsholm* on her last trip from the Orient. On December 1 we arrived in New York, after seventy-two days at sea, just in time (and only just!) to have our sixth child, a girl, born in Presbyterian Hospital, New York City. We named her Victoria. Three weeks later we were able to leave the hospital to spend Christmas with my family in Mechanicville.

It was a dream come true—a dream we hadn't dared to

dream, this being with Mother and Daddy and my sisters, Helen and Geneva. Brother Bob had brought his bride from Texas and we fell in love with Dorothy. Our youngest brother, Jim, was in the army on the west coast and couldn't be with us. But Mother Scovel, too, was on hand to celebrate the Holy Birthday with us and to see her new grandchild—"the best Christmas gift anyone could possibly have," she said, "the baby, and having you home."

Thinking of our friends left back in the internment camp, we couldn't help feeling how undeserved were our blessings to have been among the three hundred (out of fifteen hundred) to be repatriated. Our baby was *alive* and we were free! A live baby and freedom—could anyone in this beloved country of ours realize what gifts these were? Why, we could take her anywhere we wanted to without first having to get a travel permit! We could pack a suitcase and know it would not be ransacked or even searched! Our friends could drop in to see her without endangering themselves by calling on us! What a Christmas! It was glorious to be home, with all the dangers passed. We moved to Rochester, New York, where Fred joined the medical department of Eastman Kodak. We even found a furnished house there, when everyone knew we couldn't.

One of the first things we did in preparation for the Christmas of 1944 was to buy another copy of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. We had lost everything in China but our clothes. There were things we needed more than books, but *this* book we knew we couldn't get through Christmas without. We bought a small 1940 edition (put out by the Monastery Hill Press for Holiday House, New York) with good print and delightful illustrations by Philip Reed.

Soon after we were married, we had begun to read aloud, each Christmas, the *Christmas Carol*, all five staves of it—one a night, the last stave on Christmas Eve. It was fun to watch

the children grow with the story, to see their faces light up as they recognized a nuance for the first time; to hear them quoting lines in the context of their everyday lives:

"You're a 'squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel has ever struck out generous fire . . .'"

"'Come in! And know me better, man!'"

How they loved the Fezziwigs' Ball, with the fiddler tuning "like fifty stomachs" and Mrs. Fezziwig, "one vast substantial smile," then old Fezziwig himself, dancing and cutting "so deftly that he appeared to wink with his legs. . . ."

We all delighted in the descriptions of the shops on Christmas Eve: the fruiterers with "great, round, pot-bellied baskets of chestnuts, shaped like the waistcoats of jolly old gentlemen, lolling at the doors, and tumbling out into the street in their apoplectic opulence . . ."; and the "ruddy, brown-faced, broad-girthed Spanish onions, shining in the fatness of their growth like Spanish Friars . . ."; and the fish, "gasping round and round their little world in passionless excitement"; "and the grocers! Oh the grocers!"; and Mrs. Cratchit, "brave in ribbons," cooking her Christmas dinner and supplying us with a line sure to be pronounced by some man in the family, whenever a roast is brought on, no matter what the meat: "There never was such a goose!"

I usually did the reading; that is, until we reached the scene where the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come shows Scrooge what will certainly happen in the Cratchit family if things go on as they are. I could never get through the death of the Cratchits' Tiny Tim. Year after year I would try. By taking deep breaths, I could manage the arrival of Bob Cratchit, his tea ready for him on the hob, and their all trying "who should help him to it most," but before the moment came when the grieved father cried, "My little, little child! My little child!" one of our children would say, very softly, "Now, Daddy." And Fred would reach over for the book, to read on to the place where the



Spectre takes Scrooge to see what might become his own dismal future, and I would have stopped crying enough to go on reading.

By Christmas Eve I was always much too tired and had far too many things left to do to use the time it took to read the last stave. But if I didn't, that would spoil it all! The book had been written for this final chapter; every word had led us to this point. And who could resist its opening?

"Yes! And the bed post was his own. The bed was his own, the room was his own. Best and happiest of all, the Time before him was his own to make amends in! . . . Heaven, and the Christmas Time he praised for this! I say it on my knees, old Jacob; on my knees!"

Who would miss the fun Scrooge had in righting all his wrongs, his being so excited he made "a perfect Laocoön\* of himself with his stockings"; or the "intelligent boy!" the "remarkable boy" who bought the prize turkey—"Not the little prize turkey; the big one" for Scrooge to send to the Cratchit family; or the morning after Christmas when Scrooge frightened Bob Cratchit almost to the point of calling for "help and a straitwaistcoat" because the old man said, "I am about to raise your salary!"

Scrooge "did it all, and infinitely more; and to Tiny Tim, who did *not* die, he was a second father . . . and it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us, and all of us!"

Thank you, Charles Dickens, wherever you are, for your gift of *A Christmas Carol*. Who of us could fail to keep Christmas better, having once known Scrooge!

\* Fortunately, the Calvert Course, which I was teaching the children, had supplied us with a photograph of the magnificent Greek statue of Laocoön wrestling with the sea serpents. Making a perfect Laocoön of oneself became a frequent saying, as for instance, when I was caught trying to paper the bathroom with strips of contact paper.

Perhaps you would like to keep a list of the books you get for Christmas each year.

[illegible]

## SIX

Fred was among the first of our missionaries to return to China after the Sino-Japanese War. He went out on a troopship which was not about to take aboard a woman with six small children. That Christmas in Rochester, without husband and father, is one we would choose to forget entirely were it not for our good neighbors next door, the Alexander Russells. Alex and Editha came over to open their gifts with us and stay to dinner; then they had us all over at their house for supper. They made our day and we will ever remember their loving thought of us. Still, my diary for December 25, 1945, reads, "Christmas in a world at peace, and the loneliest one of my life."

But I had a special gift from God that Christmas, a gift which has helped me through many Christmases since. It was another lean year; our meager salary had to cover the running of two households a world apart. Fred lived on practically nothing in Huai Yuan, Anhwei Province, where he was rehabilitating our mission hospital ravaged by war. I did the

best I could to feed, clothe, and house the seven of us with my more than half of the salary, plus honoraria from speaking two or three times a week. Then came Christmas. How could I buy things for the children, for the family, and for friends who had done so very much for us?

One of the lessons in giving, and perhaps the hardest to learn, is acceptance. One might paraphrase a line of Scripture and say, "It is a happier thing to give than to receive." But it is also a loving thing to accept gifts graciously and thankfully. I had decided that this is what I would do for the coming Christmas. I had had the fun of giving all my life. This year I would gratefully accept.

Then I found my gift from God. I was reading the Moffatt translation of the Bible, the first new book I had held in my hands after the internment camp. Fred had given it to me in the hospital after Vicki was born. Popular translations of the Bible were not so common then as they are now. How I reveled in this new leather-bound book with all the freshness of meaning it brought!

At the moment, I was reading in the ninth chapter of Second Corinthians. I could almost feel the eighth verse being laid in my hands: "God is able to bless you with ample means, so that you may always have quite enough for any emergency of your own and ample besides for any kind act to others."

I believed it; I accepted this gift, though it wasn't what I had had in mind when I talked to myself about acceptance. But what a joy to be able to accept *and* to give! The promise was true; I had enough money to buy a present for each child, I don't know how. I suddenly remembered the star candles we'd made when the first three children were small. So I asked Central Presbyterian Church if we could have the candle stubs left over from Sunday services and were given a whole box of them. Everyone we could think of, relative or friend, received floating candles from the Scovels for Christmas.

The diary for December 25, 1946, has this entry: "What a strange way to spend Christmas—taking sulphur and looking at the canvas bottom of the bunk above me. *But* going to Fred!"

The six children, Mother Scovel, and I were aboard the *Marine Lynx*. Having been separated from Fred for a year and a month, our visas for China had finally come through. Mother Scovel was ill; so was I. Hourly, I thanked God for friends like Dorothy Wagner and Stella Walter, and the young bride, who took care of us and the children.

I don't remember how or when I actually wrote the entry in my diary. I don't see how I could have found it or the pen or the strength to write. Perhaps it was early on Christmas morning, when I tried to arrange the crèche for the children.

I do remember crawling out of the bunk while the children were at breakfast, and the endless time it took to arrange the figures on the flat of the suitcase with the ship rolling from one side to the other. I remember the effort it took to haul out the suitcase that held the presents. And I remember the relief of being in the bunk again after the preparations were finished. The rest of that day was for me merciful oblivion.

It was, as Carl once said, "a Christmas by which to judge all others." Years later he would write this memory of it:

## CHRISTMAS AT SEA

*by Carl Scovel*



Christmas in 1946 was a gray day. The sky was gray, the sea was gray, the ship was gray, and even we were a little gray after two weeks of sailing across a choppy Pacific. We were

two hundred children and wives of missionaries returning to China on an old troop transport named the *Marine Lynx*.

Seven of the two hundred were Scovels. Our father had preceded us to China by a year. He had reopened a mission hospital closed by the war and was continuing his work as a missionary doctor. His letters to us in Rochester, New York, had been filled with reports of change and turbulence. It didn't sound like the old China we had left.

He would meet us when the ship arrived in Shanghai. Jim and I, the two oldest children, would remain there for boarding school; the younger four would stay with our parents three hundred miles away in the interior of China.

As I look back on this voyage two things impress me. First, I am impressed with the dismaying uncertainties toward which we sailed—a country and a history in upheaval, and for Jim and me the prospect of living apart from our family for the first time at a school which we knew nothing about. Second, I am impressed with how little we thought or felt about these uncertainties. I don't remember discussing them. I don't remember worrying about them. We accepted them without reflection.

You must understand these uncertainties if you are to understand the Christmas Day which we spent aboard the *Marine Lynx*. It was a day with a color—gray. The ship was pitching and I doubt if I ate any more than my usual few mouthfuls. The meals aboard the *Lynx* were so tasteless that to this day I have no specific recollection of eating during those seventeen days. Indeed I have only one clear memory of Christmas Day itself.

Six children, aged sixteen to four, stood around their mother's bunk, the lowest in a tier of three, in a great room in the ship's hold. Our mother was not only seasick; for five days she had been ill with lobar pneumonia. She had put the family crèche on top of the suitcase beside her bunk and arranged the gifts

in front of it. We opened the gifts, we thanked her, and then she went back to sleep and we went up on the deck to play. And that was Christmas.

Except for one thing more. Every night after dark the high school bunch gathered in an empty gun turret, snuggled up to one another, and there in the warmth of our peer group told stories, swapped jokes, and sang camp songs, folk songs, and hymns. On that Christmas night I am sure that we must have gathered in the gun turret and surely must have sung some Christmas carols.

As our rolling ship carried us through the night and over the tossing sea toward an uncertain future, the experience of singing with my peers was a little sign of graciousness in a very frightening world. To be sure, there was not grace enough to hold back the darkness, or revolution, but there was a sign at least. That much. And in this world we can be grateful for a sign.

*King's Chapel*

*Boston, Massachusetts*

## SEVEN

The celebration of Christmas in our new station, Huai Yuan, brought a new joy—two teen-age boys, home from Shanghai American School! They couldn't believe their sister Anne had grown up enough to give a concert. From then on her father always asked her to sing "O Holy Night" for him on Christmas.

We lived in a huge, beautiful old house and brought in a tree from the garden so large it had to be sawed off at the top and even then, it completely filled one end of the living room. Our ornaments looked lost in it.

Mother Scovel, now in her wheel chair, enjoyed every minute of the festivities, and so did we all.

So did we all, not realizing that by next Christmas Mother would have gone to sleep after her long illness to awake in her Real World. We were in Hackett Medical Center, Canton,



when she died on December 2, 1948. We had moved ahead of the advancing Communist Army in order to be able to work as long as possible.

Canton fell on October 14, 1949. By then Jim and Carl were in America in college; Anne was in school in Hong Kong until the following year when she flew to the United States to take her last two years of high school at Northfield School for Girls. The youngest three were still with us.

We had made our decision to remain in China under the Communist regime, thinking that Fred, being a doctor, could carry on as usual since he, too, had the interests of the people at heart and was a "worker" not a "preacher." By December, 1950, we knew that our position was untenable. Fred was not allowed to continue his teaching at the Ling Nam Medical College, nor to practice his profession at Hackett Medical Center. On December 3 we registered our application with the police for permission to return to America. We would be with the older three for Christmas!

But in spite of frequent visits to the police station, no permit was issued. We found we couldn't remain in Communist China, nor could we leave it!

Again there were no gifts for the children, and again we had a miracle for Christmas. No wonder Anne once said, "Mother, it gets so I *expect* miracles to happen." Being all together as a family in America was not one of them. But we were grateful for the miracle of gifts—this time through the head post office in Canton!

We received word that a package of Christmas gifts had been there for about two years and no one had claimed them. We could have the package if we were willing to pay the duty—a nominal amount. When we had cleaned up the contents of the package (a can of tomato juice had exploded and dried over everything), we found the perfect gift for each child—a game for Tom, a baby doll apiece for Judy and Vicki. Tom

and Fred went to work at once to make wooden cradles for the dolls, and we bought Ping Pong paddles and balls for Tom.

Judy would recall that Christmas in Canton in a Christmas letter:



Tehran, Iran  
December 29

Dearest Dad and Mom,

Happy Holidays! Here's hoping your Christmas was as merry a one as ours! It arrived here, of course, before finally heaving itself around to you. Since we were only a part of a fraction of a percent celebrating the event, Tehran went on as usual. On the way to church that morning, we drove through streets seething with normal, daily traffic. But things looked different, just as they do when you go outside on your own birthday—the pale sunshine was a bit brighter, the streets a bit cleaner, and the snow-splendored mountains a bit more awe-inspiring. Our drab city was truly blessed by the torch of the Spirit of Christmas Present.

In church this was even more obvious. I played in the Service of Morning Prayer and the sanctuary was full of those willing to greet total strangers warmly. We met many people we'd never seen before, like the crew from the BOAC 747 who'd just touched down in Tehran and wanted to celebrate Christmas.

Elizabeth behaved very well for a three-week-old baby. Granted, she chose an opportune moment to break forth into a rafter-shaking yell (the Old Testament reader was just be-

coming eloquent in his rendition of "For unto us a Child is born"); and she *did* insist on making impolite digestive noises during the sermon; but nobody seemed to mind.

The beauty of the Episcopal service and the serenity of the pine-scented chapel sank into an inward feeling of calm as we arrived home and exploded into activity. It's always chaos before a big dinner, isn't it? But so much fun! I love having millions of little black, bubbling pots all over the stove, each gurgling and cooing ecstatically. And our goldening fifteen-pound turkey was already sizzling busily in the oven, working hard to permeate the whole house with its aroma before the guests arrived.

I, of course, had little time to notice, what with running around like a scalded cat trying to (a) find things (I'm sure there was a can of cranberry jelly carefully hoarded in the garage with the newspapers and the hiking boots), (b) make things (ever peel 47,000 shallots and roll pie crust simultaneously?), and (c) arrange things (why, on special occasions, do flowers always look seasick and hang biliously over the edge of a bowl?). Well, the Tornado Warnings were still up when the guests arrived.

In they came—the English couple whom John found in the international telephone office when he was phoning you about Elizabeth's birth (He remet them when he was serving at Midnight Communion on Christmas Eve. Their hitchhiking trip to India had to be given up because of the India-Pakistan War.); another English couple, both doctors, who were working in Quetta, Baluchistan, Pakistan, and were evacuated due to the same war; the exhausted, strep-throated Episcopal Vicar, followed by his equally drained wife and two sons—in they all came, as I have said, and were very kind in helping with the last-minute preparations.

In no time, well, it was actually 2:45, we were sitting down to a meal of

Toasted Sesame Seed Crackers  
Roast Turkey with Celery Stuffing  
Mashed Ginger Squash  
Roast Potatoes  
Mashed Potatoes  
Gravy  
Buttered Peas and Baby Onions  
Tossed Green Salad  
Warm Apple Pie and Cream  
Christmas Pudding and Custard Sauce  
Coffee      Tea  
Pistachio Nuts

For the rest of the afternoon we sat around “doing our own thing”: John and the male Quetta doctor played jazz on their guitar and clarinet; Elizabeth slept; the traveling couple went back to the international telephone office to call parents in England; the women talked babies and the Vicar clung to the kerosene heater like a ship to the Lorelei and smiled drowsily at the air in front of him as he listened to the music.

Later that evening, when quiet had settled on the debris like snow on autumn leaves, I got thinking of other beautiful Christmases—the funny one when you gave Vicki and me the “hippopotamus”; the miraculous one in Canton when we were under the Communists and that rotting package appeared from nowhere. In it was Betsy! How I loved that doll, even after the foam stuffing came out of her arm because the broken tomato juice tin had torn it! Little did I know then that many beautiful Christmases later I’d hold my own baby in my arms—Elizabeth, a “doll” who looks very much like the original Betsy!

And because of our baby I think this has been an even more miraculous Christmas, even more blessed, with a deeper feeling that God is with us. Isn’t it absolutely amazing that the love

John and I have for each other is so strong it can create something tangible, a complete little human being?

And perhaps at last I realize what the First Christmas was all about.

May its joy be with you both throughout the coming year.

Love,

Judy (Scovel Robinson)

P.S. Herewith Elizabeth's footprint.



## EIGHT

One Christmas gift I would never have chosen, but realize now the valuable experience it was to learn how it feels to be "the enemy." It was difficult to go through, *especially* at Christmas. True, there were many Chinese who reached out to us in efforts of kindness (like whoever it was at the Canton Post Office who remembered that our children might be without any gifts). Our Chinese friends and acquaintances never forsook us, and continued to put themselves in difficult positions to show their love and loyalty. Still the bulk of the Communist propaganda and the harassments were planned to make us feel that we were "despised and rejected" of *all* men.

The gardener was not allowed to bring in our usual potted evergreen, and he made it clear that we should not try to do it ourselves. Not having the tree was a small thing, but it

hurt deeply that the children were the ones who were going to feel the deprivation most.

It seemed strange to be literally sitting around doing nothing the week before Christmas without the usual round of visits to the schools and to the homes of our Chinese friends. We couldn't do this without being an embarrassment to them, perhaps even a danger. We missed seeing the Christmas pageant at Ming Sum School for the Blind. It had been such a moving experience the year before that I'd come home and written a poem about it. I found my notebook and read it to Fred:

### Christmas at Ming Sum School

Little blind angels in "heaven,"  
little blind shepherds below,  
singing of Bethlehem's Baby,  
leading each other they go.

Little blind Mary, adoring,  
Joseph with downcast mien,  
crimson-robed Wise Men presenting  
gifts that they never have seen;

satin-clad fairies of Christmas,  
elves and the cherub who sings,  
shifting the while on his shoulders  
heavy, uncomfortable wings;

little blind flutist piping  
softly, while blind angels hum,  
O dear little blind beloveds,  
the Light of the World has come!

"I wish you'd write more poetry," Fred said. "You have the time now."

"The time, but not the inspiration," I told him.

"Why not give it a try?" he urged.

I tried. I sat at my desk and went through the motions and only became more and more furious at myself because I could not rise above the cold, dank walls of the living room, the too-many sweaters binding my arms, the gray sky closing me into this prison of waiting—this *agony* of waiting. According to the date on the calendar, we were to have been with the children in America by this time.

"God, I can't bear it," I said to Him. "I just cannot bear it. It's this terrible weather, for one thing. This chill would be depressing even with a roaring fire and a glowing Christmas tree."

"It won't do," I said to myself. "It won't help any to rail at God. You'll have to get hold of yourself. Maybe you should try a concrete poem, something that would only take the mechanics of drawing a picture with words."

But what? Well, I could try a Christmas tree.

A  
fir  
stood

There was the peak of it! The "A" even looked something like a star! Hmm . . . not bad . . .

A  
fir  
stood  
proudly  
in the wood

I had no idea where this was taking me. A Christmas poem should have more in it than the description of a fir tree standing in a wood.



A  
fir  
stood  
proudly  
in the wood  
outlined by sky.  
A child cried, "Look!

Then it all came!

A  
fir  
stood  
proudly  
in the wood  
outlined by sky.  
A child cried, "Look!  
The stars are all caught  
in  
it.  
God has made us  
a Christmas tree!"

And so He had! "Dear, dear God, You've done it again," I prayed. "This time I was sure even You couldn't manage it." I was elated over this small Christmas tree; so was Fred, and the children caught our enthusiasm.

"Let's find some wood somewhere, build a fire in the fireplace and pop that last can of popcorn," I suggested.

"Let's make some popcorn balls too," said Judy. "We can eat them even if we can't hang them on Mother's tree."

"And some fudge," said Tom.

"And let's set up the crèche now," said Fred. "Shall we put it on the mantel where we had it last year?"

Such a wonderful afternoon! We even read the first stave of

the *Christmas Carol*. And when we found that the nose of one of the little lambs was broken, Vicki discovered that if you cuddled its face in the hand of the Christ Child, it didn't show. With so very much for which to be thankful, I was ashamed of my reactions earlier in the day. We were together, we were well, we had a roof over our heads and enough to eat. Above all this, we could trust God for our future.

And before December 25 we even had a Christmas tree. A dear friend, the maintenance engineer at the hospital, had gone out to his family graveyard, cut down one of the evergreens (an unheard-of act), and braved he knew not what to bring the tree into the house of "imperialist Americans." "There," he said when the lovely tree was in its place. "These children are going to have their Christmas tree."

No words could express what his gift meant to us, and certainly not because we had our Christmas tree. We already had the one God had given us. But because amid all the unpleasantness of the weeks past, we knew we had a friend—a friend who was willing to give not only his gift, but himself.

A month later, on January 24, 1951, we crossed the border into Hong Kong. We were free, *free*, FREE! And no longer an embarrassment or a danger to the friends we had to leave behind.

## NINE

Color and sun exploded upon us as we walked the streets of Ludhiana, a Punjab city in northern India where Fred had been assigned in 1953 as Professor of Medicine at the Christian Medical College. India was so full of color it looked like perpetual Christmas. In the hospital the women doctors and medical students wore the usual long white coats, but from underneath them, soft saris of red, brilliant blues, pale pinks or yellows billowed to the floor in wavelets as they walked. Outside, white coats off, the compound looked as if it were filled with moving blossoms under the flowering trees—laburnum, flame-of-the-forest, and the orchidlike camel's foot, named for the shape of its leaves.

Up in the foothills of the Himalayas Tom, Judy, and Vicki, aged fourteen, twelve, and ten, were attending Woodstock School. But they would be home for their winter vacation in early December, in plenty of time to help with Christmas

preparations. Their arrival on what was known at Woodstock as "Going-Down Day" was one of the most exciting days in the year, a fitting start for the Christmas season.

Their usual train was due in at 3:21 A.M. What a thrill to hear it thunder down the track, the old station platform shuddering as if in dread of its approach! But on the train would come, grumbling into silence as it drew to a stop to spill forth what might have been Disneyland on one of its busiest days. Children were running in all directions, sorting out parents, some of whom were still hurrying the length of the train to find their children, anxious expressions of "What-if-they-haven't-come?" on their faces.

"Mommy! Daddy!" We knew those squeals from all the rest! We hugged the dusty coats and kissed the sooty faces. Tom and Fred found the suitcases. We did our best to shorten the farewells to classmates going on to farther destinations, hurried the children into the rickshas waiting to take them home through the dark, quiet streets to cocoa, "hot toast—what a change!", baths, and bed.

The next two days would be spent unpacking, shampooing the dust-stiff hair and having it "cutted," according to Vicki; washing the woolens, sorting the piles of laundry for the *dhobi* to take; all the while talking and talking and talking, playing records, making fudge; this interspersed with Tom's urgings for the girls to drop everything and "come out and run the mile."

Fred and Tom took care of most of their own Christmas shopping, the girls and I did the rest. The bazaar in Ludhiana could produce almost anything we needed, if we used our imaginations a little—kite paper in strong, clear colors made excellent wrapping paper, gold and silver braid (sari trimming), or strands of yarn were the tyings.

It was fun to walk the rutted stone of the narrow streets to

look into the small shops, slowly edging their way to the middle of the road. Shopkeepers, measuring out yards and yards of silk or ribbon which piled up in their capacious laps, sat on carpeted platforms at eye level with the customers.

Suddenly one of us would disappear—Vicki, perhaps, to return to the bell shop to buy a pair of the anklets dancers wore for the Indian classical dances. (Both girls were taking lessons and both had made surreptitious suggestions that this would be a good present for the other.) Judy and I would stay at the ribbon shop till Vicki came back so she could find us, then pretend we hadn't noticed her absence. Judy would take her opportunity to disappear for the same purpose later.

"How do you say 'sequins' in Hindustani, Mother?" she now asked.

"Judy, what in the world do you want sequins for?"

"Do you really want to know? It's Christmas, remember?"

"Okay. Let's see, how can I describe a sequin . . ."

I turned to the shopkeeper and asked, "Sir, do you have any of those *tikas* women wear pasted between their eyebrows? Only these have two little holes so you can sew them on things."

"*Sequins mujhe de dou* (Give me the sequins)," he said to his helper. That troublesome word seemed to be the only English word he knew.

That Christmas I received a beautiful red table cloth made of woven cotton from Gandhi's Ashram, embroidered all around its wide border with green Christmas trees spangled with sequins. No wonder Judy had had her light on until 2:00 A.M. Christmas morning! I couldn't have been more thrilled with my gift if I had been Tom, Judy, and Vicki on their first Christmas in India, receiving *their* gift from our fellow missionary, Mildred Hoffmeister, principal of Ewing Christian School. She had come in with a handful of wiggling black cocker spaniel.

I had told the children firmly that they would not be able

to have any pets in India. Having to go away and leave a loved animal behind, no matter how trusted the friend or relative to whom it is bequeathed, is an occupational hazard of missionaries. We had had a dog while we were on furlough in America. I had not wanted us to have a dog then. With six children, I had enough muddy feet running in on freshly cleaned floors, and enough experience to know who had to remember to feed all household pets, whatever member of the family claimed ownership.

But I had relented. And who cried the hardest when we had to leave our cocker in Rochester, New York, with our adored Kiehle cousins? Me. And who was the pushover the moment she saw the litter of puppies Mildred's honey-colored cocker, Texas, had produced? The same.

"Would you let me give the children one for Christmas?" she had asked.

"Oh, Mildred, that would be just wonderful of you! How about the little black one? It looks just like the one they had to leave," I had replied.

The children named him Tuffy "because he has a white 'tuff' under his chin," said Vicki.

(Tuffy gave us six years of love, torment, and affection, and when we left India, Mildred took him back. Texas had died and it comforted her to have the son of Texas become the school's new mascot.)

## **The Christmas Gift**

Every boy should have a dog.  
I've had it drummed into my ears  
continually for all these years.  
Of course, a boy should have a dog.

I have succumbed to pleading eye,  
to smudge of mud on quivering chin,  
his hopeful father joining in  
to ask again the reasons why.

And now I find this muff of joy  
that chews his shoes, that licks his face,  
has proved beyond the slightest trace  
that every dog should have a boy.

In June, 1956, Tom left us to attend Wooster College in Ohio. That first Christmas away from home must have been difficult for him, as it was for us. His letters spoke of our celebrations, the parties, the carollers, and of the Christmas when we were given "his" dog, Tuffy.

Years later, in Thailand, he would write his thoughts of one lonely night in New Mexico, where he had gone to spend the holidays with a classmate:

## ON TRUCHAS MOUNTAIN

*by Tom Scovel*



It was very cold, very clear, and very quiet on Truchas Mountain on the night of December 23, 1957. I had come to spend Christmas with a college friend in New Mexico, and, half by whim and half by predilection, had decided to climb this snowy peak just north of Santa Fe alone, quite alone.

There had been moments of embarrassment. It was difficult for me to explain to Jon and his parents why I should go trekking off by myself at Christmas time, up a mountain I had never even seen. We had just arrived in Albuquerque after a two-day drive from Wooster College in Ohio, and there was much to do: horseback riding along the Rio Grande, sightseeing among the nearby Indian tribes, and partying with Jon's former highschool buddies. But all that had to wait, although it was



difficult to explain just why. However, Jon and his family were understanding, and with gentle reluctance, saw me off on a Greyhound bus bound north to Santa Fe and to the mountain beyond.

It had also been embarrassing to set out from the bus, clad in an assortment of flannels, denims, and woollens, with a huge army duffel bag strapped on my back. To the passengers at the bus terminal and to the few people who passed me in cars, slowing to give me the curious glances that all Americans seem to give those who deign to walk when God gave us cars to drive, I must have looked like a coat rack that had just emerged from a nearby hunting lodge. But embarrassment evaporates with solitude, and as I trudged higher up the road away from cars, houses, and people, I lost my self-consciousness. How strange that you do not feel self-conscious when you have no one but yourself to be self-conscious of!

It was late afternoon by the time I reached the deserted ski area. My mountaineering instincts usually force me to attempt to reach the top, but this time I had no desire to do so. Plodding softly through the deep snow, I came to a ridge where I camped, the peak itself still glistening coldly several thousand feet above. It was evening and I turned to catch the sun going down in a classic Southwestern sunset.

Sitting alone on a cold, lonely mountain, I could remember things so vividly. It may have been the coldness of the snow, the clearness of the mountain air, or the quietness of the solitude. Perhaps it was the propinquity of time and space. Just as my gaze wandered from near to far—from the ridge itself to the slopes beneath, to the twinkling lights of Santa Fe, to the ever-darkening horizon—so my thoughts wandered in concert from events near at hand to memories far in the past.

The most recent memories were of the *Luminarios* at Albuquerque the night before. Jon and I had driven up the

mountain west of the city after dark and had looked down at the thousands of homes lit with candles placed in sand at the bottom of paper bags—something as simple and as drab as sand and paper bags, but so lovely illuminated by candles and seen from afar.

We had had a candlelight carol sing at college before driving out, but the memory was dark despite the image it contained. This was the part of being alone that I was afraid of; no friends, no classes, no sports, no music, no plays, no distractions of any kind to delude me from the knowledge that my academic life had been dark and cold. Even now, I had a premonition it would be even darker and colder. And what good would it do to sit on Truchas Mountain and nurse the recent failures at school? Perhaps I saw them for the first time and recognized them for what they were, just as I could recognize the confines of Santa Fe much more clearly from the mountain than from the town itself. And just as I could see the town lights in the context of the whole panorama, I learned to see some of my failures within the vast sweep of time.

But there were happier memories—memories farther back in time and space. There were memories of mountains, many memories of many mountains far away: the Himalayas and the many climbs with Bill and Tom and Bren, climbs we would never take again; Bear Mountain in New York with rocks and forests (but, to the disappointment of a boy, without bears!); Lan Tau, the island mountain in Hong Kong harbor, always surrounded by mist. I smiled as I recalled the time when my sisters and I got lost in the mist on our way to breakfast in the dinning hall and ended up (and very nearly *in*) the rocky swimming pool. And of course there were memories of my very first mountain, East Mountain in Huai Yuan, where we went picnicking as a family during my childhood in China.

But it was Christmas, wasn't it? And didn't these memories

go even farther back in space—far, far back to some hills where Someone else had been alone, not once but many times? Back in time, too, to a time when men were guided by a star?

There were many stars, and as I looked up at them and at the starlit peak, I felt that somehow it was good to be alone. I lay down to sleep. The next day I would return to Albuquerque and to Christmas. It was very cold, very clear, and very quiet on Truchas Mountain.

*Chiangmai University*  
*Chiangmai, Thailand*

# TEN

The Ludhiana Staff Christmas party was an annual event we had started early in our stay at the Medical College when we found that the unmarried women of our college and hospital had little or no Christmas celebration for themselves. They spent all their time and energy on Christmas for the students, hospital patients, workers and their families. They lived in a dormitory, so we decided to give them a party in our home. In the end we invited the whole senior staff, married and single. We were Indians, Americans, Canadians, Scots, Australians, Germans, and Irishmen. We sent out sixty-two invitations that first year. By the time we left India six years later, there were nearer a hundred twenty-five. Not all could accept, of course; Christmas or not, the ill must be cared for, perhaps all the more lovingly at Christmas.

Our hundred-year-old mud-brick house was ideal for a party. The rooms were large, the ceilings high, some of them over

twenty feet high; the floors were cement; double doors could be opened to allow for a flow of movement. And there was a fireplace in every room.

Chandru, the cook, and Balu, boy-of-all-trades, cleaned, pushed back the beds in corners against the wall to be arranged as couches, opened the dining table to its full capacity and moved it to the end of the dining room to provide a buffet. The married women of the college offered to bring the food—the specialties of their countries or families: thick, syrupy Indian sweets; the German cookies called pfeffernuesse; small mince pielets from England; Mexican tea cakes (brought by Rusty Rice, an American); fudge (chocolate and the white Indian kind, with cardamom seeds); cookies of all kinds, cakes, salted nuts, and so forth. The girls made popcorn balls. One year Chandru and I tried out Roma Chauhan's recipe for Christmas cake. (Roma was the wife of our Ludhiana Magistrate.) Tea, coffee, and Grandmother Scovel's hot spiced orange juice were also on hand.

We missed Tom's help that year, but at last everything was ready. We had only to cover the "couches" with Indian drapes and do the arrangements of evergreens, pine cones, candles, wax angels, whatever, on the dressers and mantels. Of course, the *big* mantel over the fireplace in the living room already held the crèche. Our Indian friends enjoyed picking up the figures to study the faces. Many of them had never seen a crèche before. But the Christmas tree was another thing. I kept wondering what they really thought of it, especially after my bout with our Hindu gardener. Did it really look all that silly? I certainly hoped not.

I like to think of the Christmas tree as a symbol of the joy and gaiety and lively fun of Christmas, a sign of the blessing of trees to this earth and to us, a sign of the abundance of life and living that Christ came to bring. Some of the Indian Christians outlined the roofs, windows, and verandas of their

houses with little clay lamps filled with oil—a witness that Christ was the Light of the world. We might have followed this custom, but others of our Christian friends felt it was too reminiscent of the Hindu Divali Festival, from which the custom sprang. We thought it might be best to go on with our own traditions, since Christmas was universal. But the gardener had shaken my confidence.

“You mean you want this tree dug up?” he asked, incredulous. “It’s doing very well here. *Arborvitae* trees don’t like to be moved.”

“I know, but you can do it carefully. You’re good at transplanting,” I told him. “Just put it in this box.”

“You want it planted in a *box*?”

“Yes, Mali, so we can bring it into the living room.”

“You want it in the *house*?”

“Yes. We’re going to decorate it with strings of popcorn and . . .” The further I went trying to explain, the worse it became. I gave up. By sheer dogged determination I persuaded him to bring the tree into the living room. And here it stood, our lovely tree; there was nothing I could do about it three hours before the guests were to arrive. And what on earth would *they* say when they saw some of our new ornaments, purchased in the bazaar—brightly colored small round brushes used on ricksha wheels to whirl off the mud?

“I wouldn’t worry about it if I were you,” said Fred when he returned from his final rounds at the hospital.

“Yes you would worry about it if you were me,” I told him. “You wouldn’t worry about it only if you were you.”

“Now, honey, don’t let it spoil your whole evening. These people have seen Christmas trees before—the Germans, the English, all of them and most of the Indians. Probably everyone who comes will be glad there is a Christmas tree. And think how disappointed the kids would be if we didn’t have one.”

"It's just part of the family fun, decorating the Christmas tree," I admitted.

"To tell you the truth, I wouldn't want to miss it either."

"My husband is my youngest son," I quoted.

"Better be sure Tippy and her kittens are locked up to-night," he said, ignoring my remark. Tippy was our Siamese cat. Her kittens were sure the tree had been set up just for them. They scrambled up it and into it, batted at Christmas balls, knocking them to the floor, tangled themselves in the tinsel. Tuffy did his best to bark them down, which only resulted in their climbing so high they almost broke the top branches. While we were trying to catch one, another would break away and run for the tree again. At last we rounded them up and banished them to the back of the house.

"They'll be all right unless Chandru needs something from the storeroom and forgets they're in there," I said.

"Any hot water for a bath?" Fred asked.

"Yes, Balu has had the charcoal burning in the *hamam* for a long time. And I have your tuxedo laid out on the bed."

"My what? Don't tell me I have to—"

"But darling, you said you would."

"I know, but that was a long time ago. Well, okay, I suppose I'll have to."

"Daddy, you always look gorgeous in it and you know it and you really like it," said Judy, coming into the room and following her father to the foot of the stairs as he hurried off, chuckling.

The party was all we'd hoped it might be. The men were handsome in their evening attire, the Indian women resplendent in their beautiful saris; but then the Indian women always were. It was the foreign women who were completely transformed by their long satins, chiffons, or taffetas. We were so used to seeing one another in uniforms or cotton dresses or in suits and sweaters we'd been wearing forever.

There were quantities of the delicious and exotic cakes and pies and cookies; there were games and there were carols, including all the verses of "The Twelve Days of Christmas" sung at gratifying speed; there was Santa and an exchange of gifts—everyone had something from the old Saint; there was the usual request for Dr. Kundan Lall's solo, "*Those days were very, very, beautiful—ah . . .*", and there were "adverbs" and there were charades.

I was used to the simple charades, worked out on the spot by dragging in an ironing board and getting Anne to press a pair of her father's pants as she sobbed and wiped away pretend tears—obviously, "Pressed-by-teary-Anne" denoting our denominational persuasion. But these charades, put on by the English members of our staff, were theatrical productions, with props and elaborate costuming. And they were not easy to guess, either.

When we had laughed till we were exhausted, and the props and costumes had been stuffed into suitcases again, our Indian pastor, Padri Amos Boyd, rose to say a parting prayer, raising his hand to invoke a Christmas blessing upon each of us, upon our work, and upon those we loved "wherever they may be."

The good-nights said, we came back into the living room for one more look at the candlelight flickering on the figures of the crèche. Occasionally, one of us would rise to rearrange an ornament on our shining Christmas tree, which, after all, *seemed* to have delighted our guests, reminding some of former Christmases, viewed by others as something new and beautiful. Even the wheel brushes had contributed their moments of amazement or amusement.



## ROMA CHAUHAN'S CHRISTMAS CAKE

*(her mother's recipe)*



Note: 1 seer is equal to about two pounds

- 1 seer butter
- 1¼ seer eggs (in shells)
- ¼ seer sugar
- ¼ seer mixed citrus peel
- ¼ seer crystallized ginger
- 1¼ seer raisins
- ½ seer manaka (large raisins)
- 1½ seer petha sweet (pumpkin preserve)
- 1 seer almonds (in shells) or ¼ seer (shelled)
- ½ seer flour (or slightly more if needed)
- 2 jaiphals (nutmegs)

Each of the following should be equal in weight to the 2 jaiphals:

- javathri (mace)
- small elechi (cardamom)
- stick cinnamon

Powder the above condiments and strain through muslin.

Cream butter and sugar well, add the beaten egg yolks, and cream a little more. Add the fruit, almonds, and spices. Last of all, add the flour and stiffly beaten egg whites. Add a little burnt sugar as desired, for coloring. Bake as for any fruit cake.

Makes five or six good-sized cakes.

Rusty Rices's recipe for

### **MEXICAN TEA CAKES**

Mix together thoroughly

**1 cup margarine**

**½ cup sifted icing sugar**

**1 teaspoon vanilla**

Sift together and stir in

**2¼ cups sifted flour**

**¼ teaspoon salt**

Mix in

**¾ cup finely chopped nuts**



Chill dough. Roll into one-inch balls. Place on ungreased cookie sheet. (Cookies won't spread.) Bake until set, not brown. While still warm, roll in confectioners' sugar. Cool. Roll in sugar again.

Temperature: 400°.

Time: Bake 10-12 minutes.

Amount: About 4 dozen one-and-a-half-inch cookies.

# ELEVEN

Joy and sorrow battled each other in our emotions during Christmas of 1958, our last in India. Fred would be leaving us on Christmas night and would not be back until February. He had been asked to become Secretary of the Christian Medical Council for Overseas Work, with headquarters in New York City. In this capacity he would be concerned with the medical interests of over a hundred Protestant denominations. In order to familiarize himself with more of this vast field, he was to visit hospitals in Taiwan, Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Thailand, and Burma. We would all be leaving India after Judy's graduation from Woodstock in May.

And I had been asked to take a position in the Communications Department of our own United Presbyterian office and would be writing of our overseas work. The decisions had not been easy to make. We had planned on a lifetime of service

abroad. But Fred and I both felt that the call had come from God and that part of the reason for the call was for us to be in America with our children during these important years of their lives. Anne and Carl had both been married and we hadn't been with them. We wondered how we could have allowed ourselves to be separated from them for six very long years.

Now we would be together, all of us, for Christmas, 1959! I almost choked with joy at the thought of it. Meanwhile, there were all the wrenchings to be faced of a last Christmas in India. Not that the hilarity abated—1958 was the year I was given a pencil at the Annual Staff Party.

To be sure, it is not unusual for a writer to be given a pencil, but this one was three feet five inches high, twelve inches in circumference, and weighed a little under ten pounds, if our bathroom scales were to be trusted. It felt even heavier. The remark "Why not? It's a *lead* pencil" was greeted with groans. Its hexagonal length and symmetrical point had been perfectly constructed of teak—by the carpenters at the hospital, we gathered. The wood had been sandpapered to a satin smoothness, then stained and varnished to resemble a pencil so perfectly one knew that if the Jolly Green Giant ever gave up canning to become a writer, he would have just what he needed here. He couldn't run off with it, however, for along the side was printed, "M. SCOVEL—XXX H.B."

The perpetrator could only be Mr. R. W. Royston, out from England for two years as business manager, and living with us. It may have been in retaliation for our Christmas gift to him the year before. R. W. had an elaborate system of using razor blades to make them last longer, one every so many days, with a rest period of varying days in between—something about the molecular structure. To him it was all very simple; to the girls and me, unfathomable. We joked about it a lot and decided we would give him razor blades for Christmas.

Not just a package of razor blades, mind you, but a package every hour for eight hours. Each one was wrapped in something different. He might find his razor blades in a mug, or between the pages of a paperback, or inside one box after another, or in a bag of sweets, and so it went.

(In the end R.W. got the best of that joke. His razor blades have long since been used up. Or have they? I still have the pencil and he should know what it has done to complicate our lives when packing and moving! Each time we start to measure it against the length of a trunk, dreading the expense of ten pounds extra weight, my mind knows I should get rid of it. But my heart? Well, there it stands, my pencil, in the corner of the study as I write.)

The party became quieter than usual for Padri Amos Boyd's prayer that night, and I held back the tears when he blessed us and when the good-nights on the veranda, under the stars, held the feeling of good-by.

As the members of our household who called themselves our servants gathered in our living room that Christmas Eve, Fred told them, as he had each year, how grateful we were for all they did to help make possible our work at the hospital. He reminded them that, in God's eyes and in ours, their work was every bit as important as his. Even our Hindu gardener was present. Usually he would not remain for the meal we ate together later, but this time he said he'd stay and have some tea and perhaps some cakes we'd bought in the bazaar especially for him.

The table had been moved back and we sat on the floor, Indian style, a tablecloth spread before us. Chandru had cooked the food, unwilling to take a chance on what I might prepare. Judy and Vicki waited on table between bites. It wasn't quite so much fun without Tom. This was his third

Christmas away from home. In the past he and Chandru had kept up a running banter throughout the meal:

Chandru: A little more service here, young man. I'm out of tea.  
Tom (*quickly throwing a towel over his arm*): Tea coming up, sir. Any other service?

Now Chandru wanted to know how Tom was; what his last letter had said; was he doing well in school?

Umda, Chandru's wife, drew a long sigh.

Would ever a Christmas come without our thinking of our Indian friends dropping in on Christmas Eve to sing the carols in English, Punjabi, or Hindustani? We would recall the groups of villagers singing their syncopated *bhajans* to the rhythm of the *tubla* drums; teachers from Ewing Christian School, whose accompaniment was the beautiful sitar; the different groups from the hospital, and especially our students who every week met in our home with Dr. Lakshmi Rao, Dr. Mukerji, and other faculty members for Bible study or an occasional party.

They came in, that last Christmas Eve, and stood in a circle, light from candles shining up into their faces. I wanted to name each name, take each hand, look into each pair of eyes. "Children of ours, where will you be the next time we see you," we wondered.

More carolers and more— Suddenly we heard, in English, a strange song to be hearing in India:

*Home, home on the range,  
where the deer and the antelope play. . . .*

Who in the world? . . . and a guitar accompaniment? It couldn't be! We rushed to the door as in trooped our neighbors, the whole Sardar Khan family—mother, father, children, and

grandchildren—all of them having a good laugh at the look on our faces.

"We thought we'd surprise you with a real American song," said Sham Shad, who played the guitar and had even found a cowboy hat.

"You certainly did," said Fred. "We were sure we weren't hearing what we thought we heard."

As they left, Padri Sardar Khan took our hands and wished us a blessed Christmas.

Still the carolers came, until we could stay awake no longer. The rest of the night we called from the upstairs porch, "Merry Christmas," or the Hindustani equivalent, "*Bara Din Mubarik Ho* (Blessings on you, this great day)," and caught what sleep we could between greetings.

That was the year we gave Judy and Vicki the hippopotamus for Christmas.

We were used to hearing the current popular songs sung when the children came home from Woodstock School, and always enjoyed being brought up to date on "the latest." But every time I tried to pin the girls down to what they wanted for Christmas, they came out with the same song, "I want a hippopotamus for Christmas, and nothing but a hippo will do." I couldn't get a thing out of them except that dratted song.

"Okay," I said to myself. "If that's what you want, that's what you're going to get." And Fred was more than ready to cooperate.

But hippopotami, alive or stuffed, are not easy to come by in India. We thought we might have to give up the project. Then one day when I was playing the piano for the Christmas songs at Ewing Christian School, I remembered *their* stuffed animals. One of the ways Mildred Hoffmeister had devised for teaching arithmetic was to have the children build life-size

animals to scale. She had on hand a baby elephant made of papier-mâché over a wooden frame and stuffed with straw. Yes, she would loan it to us.

After the girls had gone to bed on Christmas Eve, Fred, Chandru, and the men he had collected to help him, carried the huge animal on their shoulders, ever so carefully, and wedged it, head first, into the dressing room off Fred's study. Its hindquarters completely filled the double doors and sufficiently resembled that end of a hippopotamus to fulfill our purposes. On the tail we pinned an envelope for each of the girls, containing enough money to buy a sari and a few other things they might want from the bazaar to take home from India when they left.

"Now what?" asked Judy on Christmas morning, as we gave them a ball of yarn apiece, told them to start winding and follow wherever it led till they came to their presents. To see their faces and hear the laughter was more than enough to repay our efforts.

Myrtle and Raymond Cray, Ohio State representatives from the Government Agricultural College across the city, came in just in time to see the fun. Their usual ritual was to arrive on Christmas morning with a freshly baked stollen to eat with our coffee after all the gifts had been opened. They wouldn't stay. We were all going to be at their home for dinner that night. Ray would take Fred to the train afterward.

If I could manage to live without him until February, it would be our last family separation for a long time. The thought of our next Christmas at home, all of us, in America, would help to carry me through. But no matter how many joys there were to come, the words of Dr. Kundan Lall's solo would still be true:

*Those days were very, very beautiful—ah. . . .*



Here is a Christmas tree decoration I wish I'd known about when we were in India because our Indian friends would have enjoyed it (and besides, spices were not as expensive in India as they are in the United States!):

### FRAGRANT SPICE BALLS

*(not to be eaten!)*



Take applesauce

Add ground spices

    clove

    allspice

    nutmeg

    cinnamon

until the mixture is the consistency of clay

Take up enough of the mixture to roll in the palms of your hands to make a ball the size of a large walnut

Tear 2-foot lengths of the smooth, paperlike ribbon (used to wrap presents) into  $\frac{3}{8}$ -of-an-inch-wide strips

Thread two or more colors of these strips into a darning needle and pull the ribbon through the spice ball (far enough into the ball so the ends don't show) and out at the top

Close the bottom of the hole with one whole clove used as a plug, the "pin" end inside the ball

Tie the ribbons at the top in a fluffy bow, leaving a loop by which to hang your spice ball on the Christmas tree

(The balls will dry out and become hard, and can also be given as gifts for use as a small pomander)

The  
Spirit  
of  
Christmas  
Present

# TWELVE

Before the next Christmas, 1959, we had found "River Bend," our dream house overlooking the Hudson River at Stony Point, New York. The children came whenever they could to scrub, tear down walls, replace windows, paint, and settle. And we were all together for Christmas.

We even had snow! With very few exceptions, all the Christmases of our married life had been spent without that commodity which New York Staters feel is essential to the true Spirit of Christmas. "It just isn't Christmas without snow," we say to one another, knowing that there was probably no snow in Bethlehem; that people of every climate celebrate the Birthday of Christ.

Our Indian friends, visiting us here, laughed at our one little plant of poinsettias, remembering the wide hedges of them in their country, growing six feet high and covered with huge, brilliant blossoms. To us, snow for Christmas meant

home, in our own country where "Christmas looked as it ought to look"—as our Indian friends would say of the poinsettias when they returned to their homes.

Fred, Vicki, and I unpacked the crèche and the two small Indian angels of beautifully glazed ceramic. They brought back memories of those wonderful Christmases in both China and India. But we were also overwhelmed with gratitude that after thirty-four moves in thirty years, we were at last celebrating under our very own roof.

"We don't actually own much more than the front door-knob," Fred reminded me.

We decorated our own front doorknob (and the rest of the front door and the back one) so the children coming home would have a Christmas welcome by whichever door they entered.

Vicki suggested that we also set up the crèche. We tried it in different places, eventually deciding on the sill of the picture window. At night it stood against the darkness, the houses of our neighbors down the hill below becoming the village of Bethlehem, with the river and hills as background.

The tree, a fine spruce, had been purchased earlier so it would have at least a week to stand in a pail of water in the cold front hall to bring out the green. We had had so much fun choosing it from a large selection on the lawn of the Garnerville Methodist Church, whose parishioners had brought them in to help pay off the mortgage. I cringed at the thought of our gardener, back in India, and what he would say about *cutting them down*. It had been trauma enough that he had had to transplant our small one.

Can anything in God's world be more exciting than children coming home for Christmas? Such a banging of doors there was; the snow blowing in with the suitcases hurriedly dropped for huge hugs into overcoats, for soft kisses on young, cold

cheeks. Then the cries of "Where's the coffee?" "Where am I going to sleep?" "Here are your gifts; where shall I put them?" "Here's some maple nut loaf I brought for us to eat after we open our presents." "When is Judy coming?" "Vicki! You've grown up!" "When is Tom coming?" "He'll be in tomorrow." "Jim, you aren't married *yet*?" "Can't find anyone to support me in the way I'd like to become accustomed."

When the last plane had been met and the last car had driven in, there was the telephone call we came to expect sometime between midnight and dawn. "Tom! Where are you?" we would ask.

"I got a ride with a friend. I'm at the gas station on the parkway." (Or, "across the Tappan Zee bridge. Got a pencil? I'll give you the directions.") I couldn't resist going with Fred to meet him, though I knew we both had to get up and be ready to leave for work by seven-thirty the next morning.

We came home at night to find the table already set with Judy's Christmas cloth and a delicious meal prepared by daughters and daughter-in-law. The men did the dishes, then it was time to decorate the tree. Squeals and exclamations of delight followed the finding of the ornaments the children had made when small, or the appearance of a special favorite.

When Fred had set the star in place at the top and Carl had turned on the lights, I brought out candy canes, some to hang on the tree, some to be eaten—a treat we hadn't had overseas. Then I brought in a bowl of oranges and explained how we as children used to suck the juice of our one orange found in the toe of our stocking: "First, cut a hole in the stem end of the orange. Then break off about three inches or more from the bottom of your candy cane and stick it deep into the orange, leaving enough to suck, as if it were a straw."

"The juice doesn't come up," said Carl's wife, Faith.

"Mom, is this one of your little jokes?" asked Jim.

"You have to draw on it for a few minutes," I told them.

"The juice will begin to come if you suck it a bit longer and a little harder."

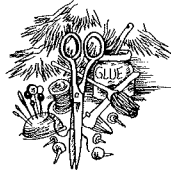
"Yeah," said Jim.

"It works!" shouted Anne, almost choking on the juice.

"It actually does!" said her husband, John.

One of the biggest thrills of our first Christmas in America was having near us what the children called "*real* relatives" (in contrast to the "adopted" aunts and uncles of a mission station). We could phone the Wixteds (my sister, Geneva, and her family) in Clifton Park, New York. My brother, Bob, and his family lived only a few miles away. He and his wife, Dorothy, and their children, Bob, Jr., Betsy, and Jim, ran in often during the holidays and we went back and forth to their house. The young people in the Scott and Scovel households were so compatible, they became far more like brothers and sisters than like cousins.

It was a perfect Christmas, and we could look forward to many more like it.



## DECORATION FOR A DOOR KNOB

Measure the diameter of your door knob

Allow another 2 inches or whatever it would take to cover the knob up to the rod holding it

Cut a circle that large out of lightweight red or green felt (Our door knob is medium sized and the circle of felt is 4 inches in diameter.)

Cut a 3-inch length of  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch white, gold, or silver elastic and sew it together to make a circle

Gather the circle of felt into the circle of elastic to make a "cap" for your door knob

The "face" of the cap covering the door knob may have on it an embroidered Christmas tree, a plastic Santa's face pasted on, your initials embroidered in gold or just the one initial of your surname, or any design you choose. Ours also has a few strands of gold braid with very small brass bells hanging from underneath the lower edge.

And just to assure you that Jim finally found her, and was willing to become accustomed to *any* way of living so long as it was with Dixie Lee Clifford, hear this:

## NEWS BREAK

*by Jim Scovel*



In his *Christmas Carol* Dickens writes of the men who work on Christmas. He mentions miners and sailors, but not newspapermen although he was one himself and although working on Christmas is as much an occupational hazard. It happened to me on a good many occasions, but the one I recall was in 1962, known affectionately thereafter as the Big Story of the Smallest Tree.

I had drawn the night shift on Christmas Eve at the small upstate New York paper where I had been working. Bachelors working on small papers can expect this, although it was to be my last Christmas in that category since I was to be married the next May. But on this leaden gray afternoon it was all very far off as I checked in on the job.

Christmas comes and goes, but any eight hours in a city room presents its own litany: the peck of typewriters and teletypes, the smell of ink and hot lead. It was Christmas Eve but Santa's biggest present so far had been next year's city budget. After it was in, I checked out. I went back to my second-floor apartment and a surprise.



In the corner of the living room, clashing violently with the pink wallpaper, was the smallest Christmas tree in the Southern Tier. It struggled at the same time to support one string of lights and three ornaments while trying to remain reasonably erect. Which it missed by about 25 degrees.

Feeble as it was, it had been hard enough to come by. Dixie, my fiancée, had spent most of the freezing night trying to find a tree. The one she found was the last in a dreary East End lot and she had to wake up the dealer, in his home next door, to make the sale. The lights and ornaments were a present from my mother-in-law, a transfer from a far, far better tree than this.

With the tree, dinner. Dixie had also brought two steaks and one electric skillet, since the apartment's resident gas stove, moody at the best of times, took holidays off. There was also a salad. We ate, watching the tree inside battle gravity and those outside fight a rising Christmas wind while snow flurries scratched at the windows.

I can remember more elegant Christmases before and after the one in 1962, but none that left a fresher recollection that possibly it only takes two steaks to make a Christmas, or one small tree. Or one person.

*East Setauket, Long Island*

# THIRTEEN

Here I must go on record that Christmas was the one time of the year when a career was the last thing on earth I wanted; when I was far too tired to do more than somehow pull through; when the pressures of the office covered like a gray blanket the hours of preparation and celebration. And it was especially difficult in those years when Christmas did not come on a weekend and we had only the one day or a day and a half off.

Remembering how the whole country of China took eight days off for Chinese New Year without the Republic collapsing, I hereby launch a campaign for an eight-day Christmas holiday; either the week between Christmas and New Year, when nothing gets done anyway, or, preferably, four days before Christmas and four days after Christmas. I know that makes nine, but an extra day, *The Day*, will do no harm. The four days before are so that Father can have some of the fun of the Christmas preparation and so the whole family can redis-

cover Advent, which much of the Christian Church has lost in the deluge of *things* to be done before the holy Birthday.

We are being told continually that we must find ways to use our leisure. We have no leisure. Working people simply take another job. Executives schedule more and more meetings on weekends. I am shocked that church executives are using weekends to do what they should be doing during the work week. Even Sundays are not kept holy. Incredible. Work has become a great juggernaut crushing down upon all we hold dear, all that would keep us sane—family, home, play, fun, laughter.

Time does not control us; we, by right choices, control our own use of time. It isn't impossible to say, "Sorry, I take weekends off." It isn't impossible to say, "Sorry, I need eight days for Christmas, and so, sir, does everyone else." Christmas, but first Advent, is the time to rethink our values; to prepare spiritually for the year ahead, for Advent is the beginning of the New Year in the Christian calendar.

Right on, friends! Right on, for a Blessed, *Merry* Christmas!

And I wish we could invent a magnetic ring to encircle the season so that no bad news could break through. Though the day is filled with scintillating magic, there are no charms to ward off sorrow. There was one black Christmas when we learned, on December 23, what we had been fearing for weeks. Fred's department, as such, would be merged into another function and he would be without a job. The position offered in its place, at a higher salary, he felt he could not accept.

The news came at a time when his plans for the future were just beginning to bear fruit; when he was able to see ahead to what he was quite sure would eventually be accomplished. Fred accepted the deepest disappointment of his career with no bitterness. This could not be said of his wife and children. We tried, because we knew our attitude was only cutting deeper into his wound. Judy and Vicki, the two children left at home, showed their love for him in every little act. The other

children wrote long, encouraging letters or phoned. But we could feel his fear for our future and we could not hide our fear for his.

Into such a world was the Christ Child born. It was such experiences that He came to redeem. Though we knew we should trust Him for the future, it was not easy for us to let go of our bitterness—to accept the gift He gave. In the end we discovered that Christmas did not have to be happy to be blessed. We were very close to one another across the miles that year as we celebrated Christ's Mass.

Within days Fred was asked to take a new and better position as Associate Director of the overseas medical work of our denomination. Nothing could have pleased him more.

"If we'd only known about it on Christmas, what a happy day it would have been," we said to each other.

Then it occurred to us that perhaps we had received gifts through this experience that we knew nothing about. We thought of Carl's Christmas at sea, which had been for him a growing up; and Tom's night on Truchas Mountain when he found a new perspective.

Perhaps the experience of suffering through a hard Christmas with her father helped Vicki to meet her difficulties some years later, alone in New York City on Christmas Day:

## **MY MOST MEMORABLE MISERABLE CHRISTMAS**

*by Victoria Scovel Harris*



Christmas in New York, the most beautiful city in the world during the holidays; at least that's what I kept telling myself. Here I was, alone; my parents so near, just thirty-eight miles

away in Stony Point, and yet so far, because I had to stay in the city to work. And speaking of being far away, Jim, my future husband, was in Florida.

And yet I couldn't ignore the bright lights sparkling from the skyscrapers, or the gorgeous shop windows on Fifth Avenue. The tree in Rockefeller Center had been exquisitely decorated and ceremoniously lit by the mayor. Even the salesladies were cooperating with Merry Christmas wishes to one and all as I emptied my checking account on gifts for my dear ones.

"What am I doing here anyway?" I kept asking myself. My realistic side replied that I had a good job as a reservation sales agent for the best airline in the country. Just because I had to work on Christmas Day was no reason to get overly upset. My inner self had a completely different answer to the question.

Christmas Eve came. I put up a little artificial tree in my window and decorated it with the usual lights and ornaments while listening to Christmas music on the radio. Then I phoned Jim in Florida to wish him a Merry Christmas. When I hung up I didn't feel any better.

Five-thirty A.M. is early any morning but on Christmas morning it seemed more like three. Before I got out of bed I gave myself a stern lecture. "Vicki, this is Christmas Day. Although you would like to be somewhere else right now, you have plenty to be thankful for. You have a family who loves you and is thinking of you, to say nothing of a wonderful fiancé with whom you'll be sharing many Christmases to come. You're in excellent physical and reasonably good mental health, so get yourself out of bed and face this day with the old Vicki spunk!" HA!

I got up and started off to work determined to maintain the Christmas spirit.

The subway station was deserted, except for a nurse in the

same situation that I was. I thought of going up to her to wish her the season's greetings, but one look at her face told me she could have competed with Scrooge for the annual "Humbug Christmas Award" and beat him. At last a subway screeched into the station. I stepped into a car and found four drunks passed out in various reclining positions. I chose a secluded seat and was just about to sit down when I saw that someone had been sick all over it. My Christmas spirit slumped considerably.

I was scheduled to work from 7:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. The day started out fairly light and we were instructed to answer each phone call as usual but to add a pleasant "Merry Christmas." Things were progressing smoothly until the weatherman decided to give New York a Christmas gift in the form of a blizzard. Slowly, air traffic came to a gripping halt. One by one, all three metropolitan airports had to close. Roads to and from them also closed. People were stranded and the airports were so packed with travelers that there wasn't even standing room. The restaurants began to run out of food. Our phone lines were jammed with irate calls. It wasn't long before I dropped the pleasant "Merry Christmas" because it was usually followed by a string of swear words accusing the airline of being completely responsible for the weather conditions.

As the hours struggled by, the situation only became worse. I was asked to work overtime and decided that I was better off there than in my room alone.

More snow . . . More calls . . . More swear words.

The supervisors came up with a wonderful idea. It was announced that we would be given a free Christmas turkey dinner. My stomach growled as I envisioned one end of the employees' lounge boasting a buffet table heaped with golden brown turkeys stuffed with delicious goodness and accompanied by fluffy whipped potatoes, steaming gravy, fresh vegetables, homemade rolls, and tantalizing desserts. I could hardly wait

for my break. When it came, I ran for the employees' lounge. As I entered the door, I was given a nickel and informed that if I stepped over to the automat dispenser, I could get my Christmas dinner. What was left of my Christmas spirit starved itself out of existence. I carried the cardboard dish of cold turkey over to the electronic oven to warm it up, and then joined my fellow workers for our Christmas feast.

After the sumptuous repast, it was back to the phone. By that time I was numb and didn't care what I was called. Priorities were determined and those who were sick or had small children were given first consideration. As evening came, things relaxed into a subdued hysteria.

At 10:00 P.M. I called it a day and stumbled back to the room I temporarily referred to as "home." I turned on the radio, collapsed on the bed, and thought about Christmas. The heavenly music of Handel's *Messiah* filled the room.

And suddenly it all occurred to me. Yes, my day could easily be considered a failure. I had not been able to hold that special happy feeling of Christmas. That had been stripped away and what remained was the simple revelation, *Christ was born!* . . . in spite of everything . . . because of everything!

I could choke over saying "Merry Christmas" but it was so easy to say "Welcome, Saviour!"

*Kent, Ohio*

## FOURTEEN

As the children have married, it has become more and more Christmas-over-the-miles for all of us. And with fewer in the family, there is less and less to do at home in preparation. Too, I am no longer working in New York and can give myself my advocated eight-day holiday from free-lance writing. The celebration of the Holy Birthday becomes what it should have been all along—relaxed, worshipful, enjoyable.

Anne was the first of the children to entertain us all. She was living in an old manse in Goshen, New York, where John was pastor. The inlaid floors of the old house had withstood the feet of larger numbers than one mere family. Rooms opened into halls and halls into rooms, which seemed to have been waiting for just such a day as this. Our grandson, David, was three years old that Christmas, which gave his father the opportunity of buying a train for him. While David played with



his cousins, Helen and small Chris, just arrived from Massachusetts with Uncle Carl and Aunt Faith, the men of the family had uninterrupted hours running the train.

Grandchildren for Christmas! Fred and I looked around and could hardly believe our eyes!

"It all happened so fast," said Fred.

"I know. And I can't help being glad that no one was talking about the population explosion when we were having ours," I said.

We have a variety of Christmases now—Christmas with our oldest son Jim and our daughter-in-law Dixie in their new, tastefully decorated home on Long Island, a fire on the hearth in the den; a turkey I haven't had to touch roasting in the oven, its delicious aroma spreading through the house. Fred and Jim discuss a recent article in *News Day*, the paper for which he is a reporter and editor. Seven-year-old Jessica and Beth, aged four, run in with their new books. "Read this one, Bachi, please?" (*Bachi* is Polish for grandmother, I am told. Jessica has a friend with a Polish grandmother and "she calls her grandmother Bachi, so do you mind if we call *you* that?" I love it.) Jessica shows me the essay she has written on "Feelings at Christmas."

Jessica



S.

My sister and I  
live in a country  
where there is a  
war going on.  
We are all a lone  
in a tiny flat.  
It is Christmas  
time. We chopped  
our small ~~tree~~ tree  
down this morning.  
on the tree we

put berries. Under  
the tree are two  
presents. one of  
the presents is  
a carved necklace  
My sister is too  
little too give me  
a present But I  
understand.

Boston, where Carl and Faith are living, is a city which looks as a city should look at Christmas time. You pass a door with a huge brass knocker and look up, fully expecting to see a window flung wide and Scrooge leaning out, ready to shout, "What's today, my fine fellow?" One lovely old door does open—the wreathed door of the narrow five-storied house on Beacon Street. It opens with a bang and several shouts as Helen, Chris, and Rebecca run to meet us, followed by Faith and Carl and whoever else, in or out of the clan, happens to be spending Christmas with the Boston Scovels.

We love this house and the church, venerable King's Chapel,

restful in its simple and dignified white and mahogany, warm and welcoming with its red-cushioned pews. And the music—the recorders, flute, harpsichord, the trebles, and the bass viols, playing Bach; the organ and choir doing a new composition of the music director, Daniel Pinkham—how I have missed such church music! Then the traditional prayers of the church of my childhood, deeply moving, now, as they are read by the pastor of this church, our own son, Carl.

Back to the house to add more decorations to the tall tree standing in the bay window, the lights of the city and the Common visible behind it.

Helen has given me a handmade book of poems, the cover decorated with bright pink flowers and a tendril of soft green. Inside is this inscription:

For Nai Nai  
To add to her collection  
of my poems. And I hope  
you have as much fun reading  
them as I did writing them.  
Love,  
Helen

(*Nai Nai* is Chinese for grandmother. It is what her father called his grandmother.) Helen is eleven years old. I am interested to see what she has written. I open the book and read the first poem:



## Unexpressable

by Helen Scovel

Blazing fire  
Bathrobe clad  
Mug of cocoa  
These I've had

Out the window  
Snowflakes fall  
In the house  
Watched by all

Quiet murmurs  
Suddenly break  
By a noise  
Only happiness makes

Warmth and comfort  
Love does bring  
Silence reigns  
But hearts will sing.

Now that Anne and John and their three, David, Andy, and baby Lorraine are living in Saranac Lake, New York, we avoid the deep snow of the north country and make our visits to them when they are at their summer place on the lake, or in autumn when the color of the foliage is at its height (or, of course, when a new baby has just arrived, no matter what the weather!).

Our youngest, Vicki, and her husband, Jim Harris, make it seem like old times when they fly in from Kent State University where Jim is at work on his degree. During the week after Christmas, others of the family will be arriving to spend a day or two with them and with us.

We had Christmas early, in 1970. It began on December 11 when we arrived at Tom and Janene's apartment in Ann Arbor, Michigan. We'd hardly had time to remove our coats, much less stop to admire the beautiful things they had brought from Thailand (where they had spent a term as missionaries) when their four-year-old Derick pulled us into the living room to see the Christmas tree. It stood in the corner on a very low teakwood bed, and all the gifts were arranged on this "table" beside it. The presents had been exquisitely wrapped by Janene, each one a work of art.

But our very best gift came the next day as we watched Tom receive from the University of Michigan his Ph.D. in Linguistics. Only the fact that there seemed to be hundreds of other students going to the platform for the same purpose, kept us from *actually* bursting with pride. Now there were two Dr. Scovels.

Tom, Janene, and Derick are at present in Thailand, where Tom is teaching at the University of Chiangmai. Janene has written of another kind of a Christmas tree:

## OUR CHRISTMAS TREE IN NORTHERN THAILAND

*by Janene Nicodemus Scovel*



The only fir trees where we live in Chiangmai, Thailand, grow in the Royal Forest Preserve on the nearby mountain. Instead of taking a picnic lunch up the mountain and coming back with a live, albeit illegal Christmas tree, we decided we'd do without one. However, it is difficult to make Christmas traditional for a five-year-old son without snow, grandparents, relatives, and all the decorations that somehow unite to make the season so warm, happy, and special for the little one. Derick asked how Santa would come from the North without snow, how he could come without a chimney, and wondered how presents could be left without a tree to put them under.

I knew we had to do something, so two weeks before Christmas I asked Tom if we could go out to the umbrella village and buy as many different sizes of umbrella frames as possible. I planned to arrange them on a stick and make them into our tree.

The umbrella village is about twelve miles outside Chiangmai, a good half-hour ride on our motorcycle through ripening

rice fields. The village consists of about thirty old, Thai-style teak houses built on stilts, lining either side of a long brown earthen road. Underneath the houses are the umbrella "factories." It is always a thrill to watch these skilled artists perform the many tasks necessary to transform simple bamboo and coarse brown paper into the beautiful handmade Thai parasols.

After passing the first few houses where the paper is made by smashing mulberry leaves, we found the house where a family was working together, cutting the bamboo frames. Only three different sizes were available; the tree would have to be small.

"Making a Christmas tree, huh?" one of the women asked as she wrapped up the bamboo frames. I was amazed that even way out in this little village they somehow sensed my need to have a tree.

When we got home, we excitedly assembled our tree. Derick found it so much fun, he made another one with his Tinkertoys and said we should have asked him to make our tree instead of going way out to the village.

We attached the umbrella handle to a small flat piece of wood to make a stand. All pieces were then spray-painted green and dried quickly in the hot afternoon sun. The largest frame was put on first and the smallest last. Each was fully opened to hold the strings of green, yellow, and red paper angels, bamboo stars, and other ornaments which we made from lightweight materials readily available at the local market.

The tree was just Derick's size to decorate and when it was all done, he clapped his hands with satisfaction over the colorful cheer that radiated from our Thai Christmas tree. To everyone who saw it, this tiny tree represented the great joy, beauty, and love of Christmas time.

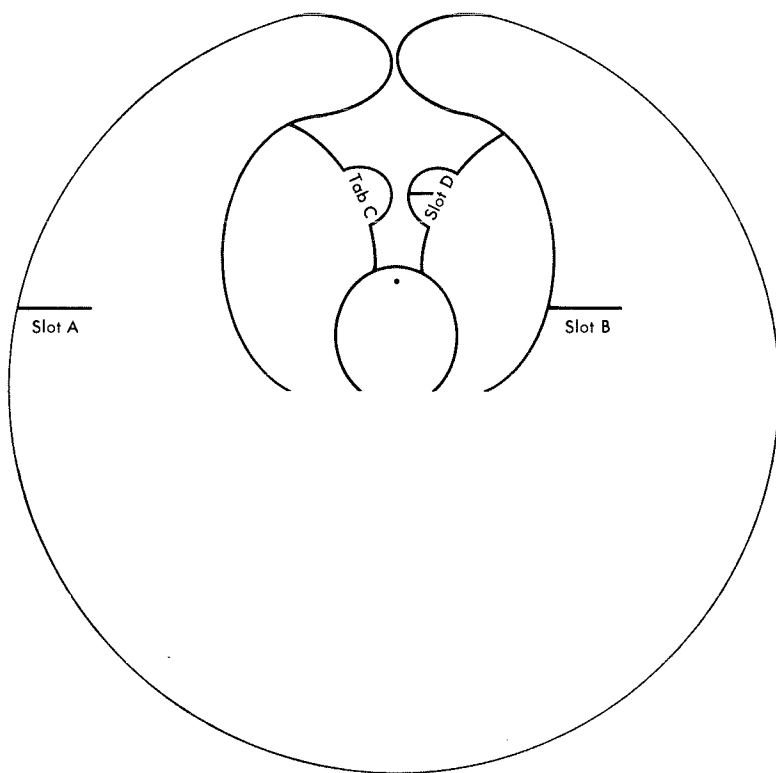
*Chiangmai, Thailand*

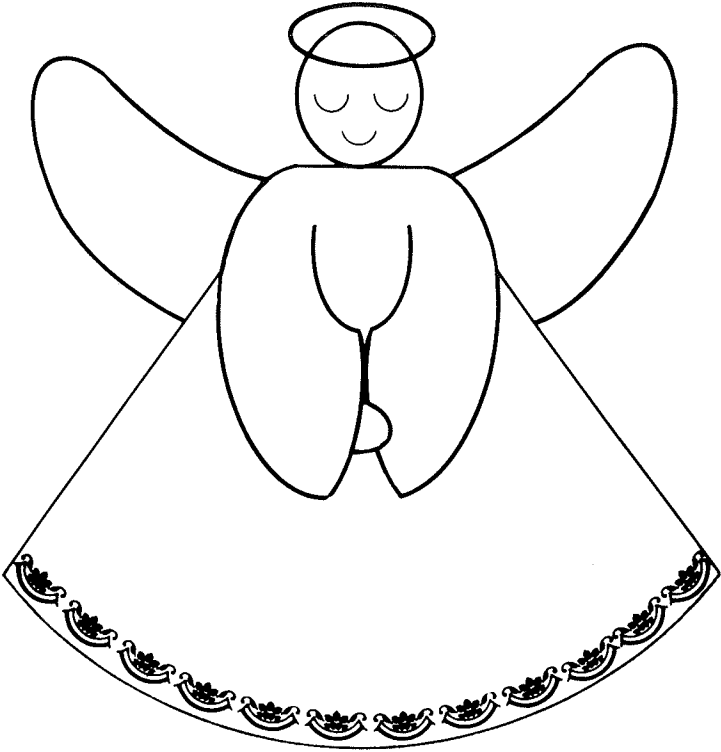


## **DIRECTIONS FOR MAKING A PAPER ANGEL**



1. Make a pattern by using tracing paper and drawing off the angel-to-be from page 100.
2. Choose paper the color you desire your angel to be, the color on one side of the sheet, white on the back
3. Cut out pattern on solid lines
4. Put slot A under slot B and pull together (The wings will show white from the front)
5. Draw arms forward and down and slip tab C into slot D
6. Using a large needle, make a hole in the top of the angel's head, and with strands of colored silk thread, make a loop for hanging





Janene's Grandmother Collier must be one of the best cooks in the world. Janene and her sister Diane, have collected Gran's recipes in a little booklet which we all use. Here are two of our beloved Gran's recipes which Janene uses for Christmas:

### CRUNCHY CHOCOLATE SNOWBALLS

Cream

1¼ cups butter

⅔ cup granulated sugar

Add

2 cups flour

⅛ teaspoon salt

½ cup cocoa

} sifted together

Add

½ cup nuts (finely chopped or rolled)

Form into balls the size of walnuts. Bake in a 350° oven for 15 to 20 minutes, according to size.

When cool, dip upper part of cookie into powdered sugar.



### ALMOND CRESCENTS

1 cup butter

¾ cup granulated sugar

2½ cups sifted flour

1 cup chopped almonds (unblanched) or pecans



Cream butter and flour until it is the consistency of putty (about 15 minutes). Add sugar and mix well. Add nuts.

Shape into small crescents. Bake on a lightly greased cookie sheet at 350° for 15 minutes.

Mix 1 teaspoon vanilla with 1 pound confectioners' sugar and roll cookies in this while hot. Makes about 4 dozen.

## FIFTEEN

One glance through the preceding chapter and it is immediately obvious that the house described in *To Lay a Hearth* has outgrown a full family celebration. Taking into consideration the Scovel population explosion, it is evident that in our living room there isn't that much space left for a play pen, a doll's kitchen, a truck circuit, twenty-four people and fourteen cups of hot tea or coffee.

But lack of space is not the reason why Fred and I now feel that our children do not necessarily have to be with us on Christmas Day. We feel that home, each family's home, is the place to celebrate the Holy Birthday. The preparations beforehand have been tiring enough. This is not the time to travel all the day before (or all the morning of) December 25 to get to a place where no one will rest as well as in his or her own bed. Too, in our part of the country there is every chance that the travelers will have to battle with poor road conditions and

that some member of the clan will catch a miserable cold.

When we returned to America, the marrieds spent alternate Christmases with parents and parents-in-law. We felt there would come a time, as the grandchildren grew older, when they would much prefer to stay at home. But having once set the pattern of alternate Christmases with parents, it would be most difficult to stop without the danger of hurting someone deeply. We decided that the move should come from our direction. We thought that perhaps the nicest gift we could give our children (and theirs) was to let them wake up on Christmas morning in their own homes; to have the day with one another; to begin *their* traditions which arise from their own surroundings, from their pasts and from the creativity of each member of the family.

And if there were parents who lived nearby, and if a family dinner would be enjoyed by all, including the one preparing the meal and doing the dishes (and the cook and dishwasher should be very honest about this), such plans could be made. My brother, Bob, always insists on taking his family out for Christmas dinner so Dorothy, too, can have a restful day.

Besides, Fred and I like to be alone. We thought we'd try it for Christmas once, much to the discomfiture of our children. We tried it, and we liked it.

We decided that our celebration alone was not to be a sad replay of past Christmases. We would dispense with the traditional evergreen tree, leaving ours to grow in the forest where it belonged. I didn't think I could face getting out the battered stars and rounds of cardboard with smudgy Santas pasted on them. The child-bearing, child-rearing period of our lives was over. Christmas alone together should have something new and somehow just our own.

That something is our Grail crèche, a gift from Judy and Vicki which has become the center of our Christmas every

year. The simple figures have a soft terra-cotta finish, with no embellishments. No halos are necessary to show that this is the Holy Family; every line of the figure of Joseph portrays his awe at the miracle of birth and his concern for the Mother. The shepherd, wrapped in rough sheepskin, a lamb in his arm, has quickly dropped on one knee in adoration; and the Mother, looking down at the Baby in her lap, has such a calmness about her that Vicki once remarked, "All I have to do when I come into the room is to look at that figure of Mary and I relax; all my tension just drops off. She's so quiet and at peace."

There are two children in the scene, a girl and a boy. The little girl has clasped her hands in delight at seeing the Baby and is sitting back on her heels, watching everything He does. The small boy, kneeling straight and tall, has brought the Baby a dove, which rests on the curve of his arm. The Baby is truly *adore*-able. Our grandchildren, arriving during the week after Christmas, can never resist (nor can I) taking Him from His Mother's lap and letting Him lie on the straw mat for a few minutes. The bird can also be taken from the boy's arm and placed in a small basket "so the Baby can see it better when He's on the floor." And the lamb can be moved to lie at the Mother's feet.

Three Wise Men were added later, a gift from Judy and Vicki and their husbands, John Robinson and Jim Harris. They complete the crèche as they round out the circle of our world, for the Wise Men have evidently come from Asia, Africa, and the Arab countries.

Above the crèche hangs an arrangement of pine cones, nuts, and fruit—tree-shaped, to be sure. Small angels hang from it; a scarlet bird nests in its "branches." And at the top is a star from Sweden, made of straw. Sometimes we lay a branch of blue spruce behind the crèche; sometimes we set up a few large pine cones to look like trees covered with snow.





Ever since we'd had our Grail crèche I'd wondered about the person who had done the original sculpture. So one day recently I wrote to the Grail Shop in New York and asked where I might find the artist. To my delight Martha Orso, the manager, put me in touch with Trina Paulus, who offered to come into New York to see me. We arranged to meet at the shop within a few days, because it turned out that we both had to see publishers that morning.

I found the shop just off Fifth Avenue on 37th Street and took the elevator to the third floor. The door opened into what looked like spring. Where did all this light come from in mid-winter New York City? The white background, the lovely flower posters, bright cards, beautiful pottery and ceramics all helped; and certainly the cordial welcome from Martha did nothing to detract from the feeling of sun.

As I waited the few minutes for Trina Paulus, I wondered what she would be like—youngish, oldish? Shy? How would I begin? The questions were answered as she stepped into the room—not youngish, *young*! (She would always be.) A merry face above the smart brown cape, and she was not the least bit shy.

"Tell me, what do you want from me?" she asked. (In the workroom Martha had spread a table with a bright cloth, set paper plates and mugs when we decided on sandwiches and coffee here instead of going out.)

"I want to know how you felt when you were creating the crèche, how the ideas came, how your hands felt, everything, all about it. Where were you when you did it?" I asked.

"I was at Grailville," Trina began. "Martha and I both were. You would have to know something of the Grail, I think, in order to understand how I came to do it."

"Go ahead," I urged.

"Well, the Grail is an international movement of women, working in about twenty-two countries right now. As in the

old legend of the search for the Holy Grail, which brought peace to whoever had it, the Grail, too, is a search for peace with justice and love for all people. It was for women because those who began it in Holland in 1921 felt that women had some very needed and significant things to contribute to this search for a new and better world. It was a movement because we would have to work together to be really effective.

"The Grail pioneered in a lot of things—in education, youth movements, the training and sending of lay people abroad, liturgy, art . . . It was probably movements like the Grail that helped prepare a climate in which Pope John and the Second Vatican Council could move. You see, although the founders were Catholic, it was ecumenically oriented from the beginning and now has members from many Christian churches as well as close relations with those from other religions. Men of the church have always been interested in our work, too. My father felt as if he belonged!"

"But you were not nuns?" I asked.

"We were never nuns," said Trina, "and many of us are married. Our spirit came from a sense of mission to the world which we felt should be common to all Christians."

"Now tell me about Grailville," I said, as Martha poured us fresh cups of coffee.

"It's a place; I guess you'd call it the physical rooting of The Grail in the United States," said Trina. "It's a four-hundred-acre farm near Cincinnati."

"The Grail came to this country in 1941," said Martha. "Grailville began in 1944."

"When Martha and I were there it was really like a kibbutz," Trina went on. "We had a community of about eighty, most of whom came for three months or a year before doing all sorts of other things, in and out of Grail structure. We were trying to make an integrated life-style. We shared all the work, were known for (and kidded about) organic farming and whole

grain bread. There were cooperative canning, cooking, laundry, meditation, all centered around the liturgy—the great cycle of feasts and fasts of the church. When we see young people today go off to find community and a simpler life-style, we really understand—don't we, Martha?—for we have done it, too."

Martha nodded her assent.

"I guess I'm still looking and experimenting with life-styles that have both integrity and commitment to the larger community—the whole world," said Trina. "For instance, I'm very involved these years with a marketing project for the hand-weaving from the city in Egypt where I worked for a year.

"This building of a personal and communal life-style and caring about the whole world is in continuity with those Grailville years; but the forms, now, are different. Most of us are scattered and less definable as Grail groupings. Hopefully, we can continue to care and support one another's search, even if we are not physically together. It's a new era, a new search."

"And the crèche, how does it fit into the picture?" I asked.

"Don't you see? The whole idea of *living a life* and finding ways of *sharing that life* more widely was why we began the Art Production and Distribution program. Religious art for the home, especially in Catholic circles, was pretty awful! Plaster statues were synonymous with junk. It wasn't plaster's fault, either! It's a perfectly fine material if used well. We thought if we made good designs with the reproduction process in mind, and meditated on solid theology, we might produce something in quantity that was worth making and using. We believed it was okay to reproduce in quantity if we tried to care for quality—an admittedly hard job, since nobody wants to care for many things the way he can care for one thing. Maybe *more* technology would help here, freeing the worker from repetitive work for more personally creative work.

"This makes me think of another concern of mine. How can

people become more creative and believe in that wonderful gift we all have? I would hate to think that greater availability of art might stifle this essential personal expression."

"You needn't worry," I said. "You should see how creatively the grandchildren play with the crèche, moving the figures to bring more meaning to the arrangement, as they see it; and my daughter once spoke of how peaceful she feels when she comes into the room and sees the madonna. That's a very creative response. It makes me want to write a Christmas poem."

"But I still haven't heard how you made it," I prodded.

"It's not easy to tell; that's why I've been putting it off, I guess," said Trina. She waited a moment, then, "Well, all right. First of all, there was a need. Everyone concerned that year at Grailville, 1957, felt that the first thing we should produce for the home was something for Christmas, something everyone could identify with—Catholics, Protestants, the Eastern Church—a crib set or crèche for today would be great. But I just couldn't get the traditional crib set off my mind. I thought about it for a year; nothing worthwhile came. I made attempts; nothing happened that was worth producing or sharing."

"It got to be July, then August, and we wanted to get this crib out for Christmas marketing. That meant molds, color, finishing, catalogue, mailing—to share something that wasn't yet born! Finally there was just one week left in which to try. I went into the corner next to the art shop to hibernate and work, hoping that something would come. When you can't find the answer in your head, sometimes working with clay will begin to show you where to go. For three days I struggled, a few halfway adequate figures came, but after each one was done, I knew they were not brilliant and not the answer."

"I started again; finally a little girl came, then the boy, then the Mother and Joseph—I didn't stop to do the detail, I just let it flow. It was a marvelous thing, and a very rare experience. They were all right with each other and to scale, no

changes were needed! It had taken a year of doldrums, three days of anguish, but there they were! The first person to see them suggested a sheep. A sheep was made and the crib set was finished."

"And they really worked," said Martha.

"The next year," Trina continued, "everyone began to say, 'But we need the kings,' a thought which I found hard to accept. Kings! What do you think of when you think of kings?" she asked me.

"Crowns and gold," I replied.

"Exactly. And crowns and gold and finery just did not belong to this simple crèche. Kings felt all wrong. I just couldn't do them. But finally I became so convinced that we *needed* kings that I surrendered enough to work seriously at them. I began to meditate and pray about the meaning of this Visitation—this Epiphany. I forgot the word 'king.' 'Epiphany' means 'Manifestation,' the light of revelation to the Gentiles. It opened the whole world! They weren't kings (that concept was added much later); they were *wise men*, astrologers, astronomers. They were not Jesus' own people; they were strangers, foreigners. The liturgy makes it clear that their coming with gifts stands for the meeting of Jesus with the *whole world* and prefigures the whole world coming to Him. The Wise Men stand, even today, for all races, all peoples.

"I looked up the story of the choosing of the new Dalai Lama. How plausible it made the Christmas story of men from the East following a star! If such a search for a baby could happen in our own time, why not two thousand years ago? When the old Dalai Lama died, the wise men in Tibet searched for a sign in the heavens indicating where the new one would be born at the exact time of the old one's death. The Wise Men of Tibet brought him gifts, among which were things belonging to the old Dalai Lama. If the child chose these, it would be a sign he was the new one. He could be born of a poor

family, but then he was to be taken to the monastery to be trained to be the spiritual and temporal ruler of his country.

"So I made the first wise man—an ascetic, a monk from the East which is so full of spiritual insights, meditation. I attributed to him the traditional gift of myrrh, standing for self-renunciation, suffering. The second figure is an Arab. He is, perhaps, white. The gift he brings is prayer—frankincense. The Arab world has such a spirit of prayer; the muezzin, calling people to worship so many times a day. The third is an African, black, kneeling on the ground which holds so many of earth's riches; bringing his gift, the celebration of the riches of *all* of life, which may be symbolized by the traditional gold.

"Then I felt that theologically we needed a different Child, more regal; no longer cuddled in Mary's arms, but the Son she gave to the world, who receives the world from His throne on His Mother's lap. What a thing to believe, God in a baby!"

Trina sat back in her white canvas chair. We were quiet for some moments, then she said, "No single work of art or life can contain fully any really important idea, but I hope this crèche shows forth something that is timeless coming from God in the flesh of man. This coming is *now*, too, as well as a great future coming. Christmas is all this—a great, many-layered event. I'm so glad the crèche has meant much to you. It's been wonderful to share this afternoon."

It wasn't easy to come back to Fifth Avenue and 37th Street.

With the arrival of the Grail crèche, we found we had to decide what we were going to do with our old German one, which, over the years, had come to mean so much to us all. Would we give it to one of the children? Which one? Well, then, should we divide it and give a few pieces to each family? Which pieces to which family? The more we fondled them, looking them over, trying to decide, the harder it became.

"We don't want to give them up, do we?" said Fred.

"No, we don't. But what will we do with the new one?"

"Can't we have two?"

I wasn't quite sure about having two Holy Families in one room; neither did we want to relegate this precious one to a study or bedroom. It evoked too many memories to cast it aside. So, across the room from the Grail crèche (which one sees when one enters the door), and in its usual place on the window ledge, sits the old German one, the angel's wing still to be mended each year, the little lamb with its broken nose still nuzzling the hand of the Christ Child.

Lest our children feel deprived, we have given each of the six families its own Grail crèche.\*

\* The crèche and other Grail art may be obtained from The Grail Shop, 6 West 37th Street (3rd Floor), New York, N.Y. 10018. Or from Abbey Press (which has now acquired the Grail art works), St. Meinrad, Indiana 47517.



# SIXTEEN



The crèche, the tree, the hanging of stockings—three traditional elements of any Christmas celebration. Our children used whatever stocking happened to be longest—their own, or their father's (if he could find that many clean ones). We filled them with the usual fruits and nuts, small sacks of various hard candies (the ribbon candy of my childhood was not available in China or India; at least we were never able to find any). Small stocking gifts were tucked in, and at the top, *always* a new toothbrush. To this day it is very difficult for any of our children to buy a new toothbrush; they keep thinking they will get one for Christmas!

The fruit is not the treat it once was. Cousin Harriet remembers Hannah Dudley, when over ninety, saying that as a child she dreamed all year of the orange she'd find in her stocking.

Nothing in our family stocking tradition is very striking or original, but the mother of one of my favorite editors at Harper & Row added a new dimension to her child's pleasure in finding his stocking on Christmas morning. Each year she would sew to the long red felt stocking a symbol of something that had made the past year outstanding—his first bicycle, a book for his first year at school, a football for the year he went out for the team, and when he had his first steady girlfriend, a pair of rosy lips.

What a lovely way to pass on to his wife and children his whole life history! But if his family turns out to be anything like ours, I fear for him. I can hear his sons now:

"Come on, Dad, tell us more about those rosy lips."

But he will probably reply calmly, "They were your mother's only I didn't know it then."

Our first grandchild, Helen, has a Christmas stocking with a history. Helen is the sixth generation to use it. It was knit by her mother's father's great-great-grandmother, Hannah Bishop Payne, wife of the Reverend Solomon Payne, a Congregational minister in Canterbury, Connecticut, for their daughter, Mary Payne, who gave it to her oldest child, Hannah Bishop McLean. From her it went to Faith's grandfather, William Roger Greeley, to her father, the Reverend Dana McLean Greeley, to Faith, to Helen.

The stocking is three feet long, closely knit of very tough steel-blue worsted with a once-white-now-beige toe, a border of the same color at the top. It is still very sturdy and intact, and has the added advantage of being capacious.

Faith's mother has made similar stockings for the other children, beautifully knit in red and green wool. Faith writes, "When Helen gets ready to hang up her blue one that looks like a cross between tough wool trousers and an army blanket, she wears a quizzical smile as she smooths it in her lap. She's

still not quite sure whether she's being gypped or honored by having this 'weird' stocking belong to her. I remember the feeling."

Hopefully, we have, as a nation, outgrown the sock full of coal for the naughty child. At least we can be thankful that it is all but impossible for a person to find coal. Surely this must be one of the cruellest and most harmful to the child of all practical jokes. And on the birthday of One who loved the unlovely, set a new path for the wayward, and forgave sinners!

But what about hanging stockings for two fairly sane adults? It seemed a bit silly. Judy, who always seems to get involved in Christmas sewing projects, solved the problem. She sent us two very gay socks of red felt, which she had made. Fred's is an argyle with green and gold diamond designs sewn on with gold rickrack to make the pattern. Mine is shaped like an old-fashioned high-topped boot with curlicue high heels. The buttons are gold and its flair top is edged with lace. Each year we hang them against a white door as decorations, though I am apt to find a box of Chanel No. 5 bulging from mine. And once, when there was hardly a bristle left in the old silver-backed brush, I put a new brush in his.

Christmas morning. The house is quiet. Too quiet. Imagine not having the far-too-short night shattered by whispers:

"Are they awake?"

"No. They don't move."

"What time is it?"

"I don't know, but you can see daylight coming."

"Is it safe to wake them up?"

"I guess so. Put on the Hallelujah Chorus, Vicki."

"Full volume."

I cannot honestly say I don't miss all this. But oh, it is luxury

to turn over and go back to sleep; to be wakened by a soft "Merry Christmas" muffled into my hair; to have a late, leisurely breakfast, go out to dinner, come home to sit by the fire and read the beginnings of five new books without one interruption.

And *then* to have the dividend of six joyous telephone calls from children and grandchildren and to know that some of them will be arriving during the week!

It's all very well to talk about Christmas alone when you mean two people alone together. What would I do if I were *really* alone? And for the first time? Supposing there were no children?

Many panaceas have been offered, such as "Stop thinking about yourself. Go out and find others lonelier than you are and do something for them." It's a good idea but it doesn't always work, as I well remember . . . When I was a student nurse at the Hospital of the Good Shepherd in Syracuse, New York, four women in the large ward were annoying the rest of the patients because they were so happy. They would call out to one another, shout with laughter, throw books across the beds—all of which troubled those who were very sick, and those who thought it improper to be happy in such a place.

At the other end of the ward was the saddest woman in the world—she knew it. And to prove it to all within earshot, she groaned aloud and cried a good share of the time. The problem looked easy to solve to a young student nurse. I put the hilarious women in wheelchairs, gave them a briefing on cheering the lonely, and wheeled them to the bedside of Mrs. Woebegone. All became quiet, and I went on with my work. After a reasonable length of time, I went back to find all five women weeping . . .

No, it might be depressing to look around my table and see five lonely people with smiles on their lips and tears in their

hearts. To be invited to a happy family gathering might be even more painful. I doubt my ability to act out the role of Christmas-as-usual under these circumstances. All this would have to come later.

Christmas might be a good day to let the pain of loneliness take over—to accept the entire weight of it down into the very depths of being. It might be a day to remember that there was no joy at the beginning of the first Christmas; instead, a long, uncomfortable journey for a reason that must have seemed only bureaucracy, a crescendo of fear when no place could be found and the birth pains had already started. The time came when the pains took over and were stronger than the woman; when the man felt helpless, guilty to have taken her so far from those friends and relatives with whom she might have been during this experience, her first.

But see how the world was changed by that one troubled night! Years later, Mary may have sensed the import of it. Joseph probably never knew that the suffering on that trip to Bethlehem had any impact whatever, beyond the quiet joy of having Jesus in their family circle.

Thinking these thoughts might bring healing enough to do one thing, however small, to keep another from having such a lonely Christmas. If it were still impossible to face a person-to-person encounter, I might send a secret gift or order flowers and sign the card, "Guess Who?" What hopes *that* might revive in someone convinced that no one cared!

Or by now it might be possible to call on a friend in the hospital. Having been a nurse, I would *not* take a Christmas tree with all the fragile decorations for two reasons: Past experience would never allow me to use for this purpose the small amount of space available in a hospital room—space needed to carry out the necessary functions of healing. And again, it would mean pretending that this Christmas was like any other, which it definitely would not be. Instead, I would

take one beautiful red rose in a small bud vase to put by her bedside table, from which the nurse could easily switch it to her tray or to a window ledge when extra room was needed. My friend could water it herself from her drinking glass.

For a Christmas gift it might be well to think of something that would bring hope—something to point to the day when the hospital sojourn would be over and life would be normal again—the January issue of *House Beautiful* (not the Christmas one); two tickets for a concert or play, dated a reasonable time ahead; a ski sweater instead of a bed jacket; a blouse or a soft wool sport shirt instead of another pair of pajamas. Any gift would have to be within the context of reason. It would be cruel to pretend that all would soon be well if I knew very well it wouldn't be. And if I didn't know, God forbid that the present I gave would bring pain—a sports magazine for a prospective amputee, or anything that might turn out to be equally as devastating.

And if total acceptance of grief and the resultant healing took place? Or if I had always been alone and liked being alone? How would I celebrate Christmas?

We become so bogged down in our own inconsequential quagmires; I'd like to study more and more ways to enjoy, enjoy, ENJOY the gifts that are ours. I'd like to try to compose a dance to be danced alone in praise of God's gift to the world; try more ways of accepting the gift of awareness, the gifts of touch, taste, smell. If I lived in a city apartment, I'd buy a plant, feel the dirt, smell it, then do the same with the leaves, the buds, the blossoms. I'd get on a bus and look at people's faces to see how beautiful they are, ride out into the country to watch the stars on Christmas Eve, walk in winter fields and really look at the sky on Christmas Day; pick up a seed pod to feel its roughness, marvel at its intricate design. I'd find a church where no service was going on and listen to

silence, kneel alone to pray, to thank God for this wonderful Birthday being celebrated by so many different kinds of people in so many different places in the world.

"And if you didn't believe in God?"

If I didn't believe in God! I don't know what I would do. It wouldn't matter because it wouldn't really be Christmas.

"But the *day* would still be there. You'd have to pass it some way. What would you do?"

I'd have to pretend. I'd have to make believe that the world was all I wished it might be, that the heavens were opening, that a healing was pouring itself out upon all the evils I knew of; that somehow, every situation I'd been worrying about could be completely changed, redeemed—the boy we know who has lost the function of his brain due to drugs; the girl in our town who has walked out on her husband, taking their baby with her.

But if I saw this healing, I wouldn't be able to keep from calling it love. Would I? If I didn't believe in God? I could pretend it *was* love, pouring itself out on a whole country at war; trees would revive; people would find new homes and live normal lives.

And if I, as I am, could dream such a dream, mightn't it be possible that there *was* a God who had thought of it first?

## A HANDY POCKET

### *Gift for a Bed Patient*



Use a piece of bed ticking 32 inches long and 12 inches wide (The new tickings are prettier than they used to be. Try to find one of an unusual design and attractive colors. Other washable materials may be used, but should be sturdy.)

Turn up 8 inches at the bottom of the strip, stitching the sides to form a pocket

Bind all the edges, including the top of the pocket, with binding to match one of the colors in the design of the ticking

The long flap slips under the mattress, at the side of the bed, making the pocket a convenient place within reach of the patient for all the little necessary articles.

You may want to include in your Handy Pocket a toothbrush in a case, a small tube of toothpaste, a book of stamps, a small pen, a pad for notes, some cuticle scissors, tweezers, a small mirror, a package of Lifesavers (if the patient is allowed sweets), and so forth.



# SEVENTEEN

"What does one do about neighbors?" The question faced us when we returned to America. We moved into our new home in Stony Point in October. By Christmas we had only a nodding acquaintance with those in our neighborhood. Aside from Margaret and Howard Lent across the street, who helped us out of every difficulty, and the Dacres, who lived next door with their five wonderful, black-haired, brown-eyed children, we knew no one. We felt a need for community which those around us either had, did not want, or were too shy to seek; we couldn't be sure which.

Not only was this true of Stony Point; we sensed it wherever we went.

"Maybe it's because the world presses in on us so," said Fred. "They feel threatened, perhaps. Television brings us news of the danger we're in all the time. No man's home is sacred anymore."

"And maybe television brings them all the friends they feel they need," I suggested. "You know, their favorite commentator, the stars in the shows they always watch, the families they get to know through the soap operas . . ."

"And these friends you can turn off or on whenever you want them around," added Fred.

"You don't have to take care of their kids . . ."

"Or lend them your lawn mower or run them down to the garage . . ."

"But then, you miss all the fun," I said.

"People just don't want to get involved," said Fred. "You hear it everywhere. But I can't blame them entirely. I know something of how they feel. I see people all day long. When I get home at night, I want to sit down and relax and forget other people's troubles."

It was true, I had to admit. You can only take so much. But did this mean that the old idea of neighborhood was a thing of the past? Did it mean that even in our small town, each family would live in its own box, not knowing or caring about anyone else? Realizing how I felt when I got home from New York at night, it could be a danger, a real danger; because if we no longer cared, if we each went our own way, paying no attention to what happened to our neighbors, or what *would* happen to their children and ours, the human race was doomed. We had to care enough to live together and to work together for the good of one another and of our land, or we would perish.

Perhaps we felt this more deeply than others because of our life in the overseas mission of the church, where we few "foreigners," outsiders in every sense of the word, lived together in one compound. There we were more like a family than just friends. Like members of a family, we argued, became angry, apologized, took care of one another when ill, taught one another's children, argued, became angry . . . and

so on. Together we celebrated all birthdays and anniversaries, the holidays of our own country and those of the country in which we lived.

To be sure, each of us had good friends and colleagues outside the clan whom we invited in to meet the "family." We did not in any way cut ourselves off from the Chinese or Indian communities in which we lived. However, it was a warm, loving, rich-in-experience haven from which we sallied forth each day into our separate worlds.

We found something very much like it in our Stony Point Presbyterian Church, but we still wanted to feel this much at home in our own neighborhood, especially at Christmas. It was a lot to expect, after only two months of living here, but something had to be done; a step had to be taken.

At the risk of "becoming involved" we decided to throw etiquette to the winds as to who should call on whom first. Though we were newcomers, we would start out on the afternoon of the day before Christmas and wish every family a Happy Holiday, taking some small gift for each child. (The children had *really* taken the first step in introducing themselves to us before we were even unpacked.)

To our delight we were received with warmth in every home to which we went. Rich friendships have developed over the years, and we have found that our privacy is not that much threatened; there are other busy people besides doctors and writers. Summers are a good time for calling to Mrs. O'Leary as she hangs out clothes, or to run in on Marie Allison or the McGuires as they do the yard work. Over a basket of vegetables from the Moores' garden, David and Fred exchange stamps; the Ehlers call out to ask how Vicki is; Mrs. Skinner and Connie arrive to show me the new aprons they're making; the Gamboli children sell us Girl Scout cookies.

Halloween is a riot when over a hundred children appear from nowhere and we find we do not recognize our nearest

neighbors. A few weeks later Peter Prideau will arrive to ask if the pictures Fred took have been developed. Come winter, Mr. Jones and young Pat Dacre try to beat Fred to the shoveling. Now the horns toot when I'm out for my walk. Everyone knows it is useless to stop to ask if I want a ride unless it is very cold or raining or my arms are full of groceries.

Some of the children have grown up and gone away, but they call on us whenever they return.

"I remember one Christmas you didn't come," said Nicki Te Bordo when he came home from college.

"We were probably in Boston," I said. "We thought it didn't matter."

"I was heartbroken. I thought you weren't ever coming again. But you gave us our presents later, when you got back."

The presents were never very much. We didn't think for a moment they'd be missed.

When possible, we try to choose gifts from another country—tiny baskets from Mexico; small wooden monkeys with long, leather-tail bookmarks from Germany; Christmas tree ornaments from Hong Kong; tops to spin or flowers to watch opening in a glass of water from Japan. Recently we chose little angels and stars and hearts made of braided straw from Sweden. We tie each child's name on the gift, then fill baskets, or red or green nut cups, with candies "so you'll have something to nibble while you're trimming the tree."

We are not the only giftgivers. The Nielsens will be waiting for us with a box of Danish cookies. (Nobody can make gingersnaps like Inge.) We ask to see the latest Christmas plate from their native Denmark. The walls of their guest room are covered with them and we enjoy their warm luster and soft blue color. The Russos will have ready a plate of Italian honeyballs, crisp and delicious; Marie, a homemade fruit cake, Mrs. Shaler, a box of candy or a pair of pillowcases with crotcheted edgings.

Just when I am most missing Myrtle Cray's visit and her Christmas morning Stollen, the McGuires step in to take her place, and the tradition goes on through these new friends.

And just when I have put the ceramic angels in their Indian baskets to give back to Judy and Vicki for their own homes, Maureen Stewart has made for us two lovely ceramic choristers to take their places. They even look a bit Indian in their bright red cassocks. The year before, her small brother, Gene, gave us a large shoe box with a few scribblings on scraps of paper. They turned out to be his version of the Manger scene. We immediately set them up on top of the piano—our *third* Holy Family that year.

Though we come home from our visits laden with gifts and aware of the little we have given, we know that to our friends, as well as to us, the gifts are not the important thing. The important thing is that we are a neighborhood.

It is good to see our children carrying on the neighborly tradition:



Saranac Lake, New York  
December 28

Dear Mommy,

The other day when I was up in the attic getting out our Christmas decorations, I came across my old diaries. In reading back as far as 1947, *every* Christmas was "a perfect day," "God is so good to us," "a marvelous Christmas," "the best Christmas we ever had"; and the exaltations continue on through all the years. So before this Christmas gets to be just another ecstatic line in my diary, I'll tell you all about this one.

For us, more than half the fun of Christmas is preparing for it. A couple of weeks before, I start the baking—all those goodies we're supposed to avoid, cookies, coffee cakes, nut breads, fruit breads, and so forth. Of course, this year I didn't get as much done because we're in the midst of renovating the kitchen and you know how it is when you have two small babies and one big son, David. What would I do without him? He's such a help with the little ones. He loves the spicy aroma of the Lebkuchen when it's in the oven and so does John.

Then there are the extra church programs which add to the fun this time of year. Everyone enjoys the children's Sunday

school program. When Santa drops in with presents "unexpectedly," the adults are just as delighted as the smallest toddler.

And what is Christmas without a puppy for the children? Well, this year we even did that! There's a young girl at John's School who comes to him when she needs advice. Her dog had pups and they were all given away except one. She said they'd have to drown it if no one would take it. You know it just wasn't fair, telling us a thing like that. I mean, what choice did we have? Right? Right. So three days before Christmas we drove to her home and after one look at Prudence (their name for her), we adored her. She's the cutest, most affectionate little beagle we ever saw! The kids just love her.

I went wild shopping this year. I broke all the rules about "overindulging children." I'd buy things weeks ahead, then forget what I had for whom, and being afraid I didn't have enough for so-and-so, would get some more. But it was such fun and I figured I'd do it this one year.

About two days before Christmas, the children and I make our annual visits to our neighbors (not that we don't go other times, too). This year David, Andy, and I got bundled up, put our baked goods in a box on a sled, and started down the street. This is one of those pleasant traditions that you and Daddy gave us. The neighbors are so grateful for this very small gesture—just a visit and a cranberry loaf. We come home knowing that they've given us more than we have given them.

John and David rush out to do their shopping for me. I try to trick David into telling me what his father bought. But the bags and boxes are hidden and I'm given strict orders, "Don't you dare go into my room."

Christmas Eve and it's *snowing*! We've had a most unusual December with only a few inches of snow. Now we realize it will be a white Christmas. I get Lorraine and Andy into their yellow snuggly "sleepers" and off we go to the candlelight serv-

ice at the church. It's packed, a real family night with everyone here from the oldsters down to the smallest babe. It's a wonderful feeling to sit with my darling and our three precious children with the candlelight flickering in their wondering eyes. I try not to think of the thousands in other lands who do not have this gift of Christmas. I say a prayer for them and express my overwhelming gratitude for all we have.

The carol singing begins, then the Bible story from Luke. It's so good to have time to sit here and enjoy this service. We all sing "Silent Night" as our candles are extinguished; and soon, after wishing everyone a "Merry Christmas," we drive home in a white fairyland.

Now is the time John and I sit by our tree. When the gifts are all laid out and the stockings filled, we have a mug of Grandmother's hot spiced orange juice. Our eyes are already drooping, so we go to bed, knowing we'll be up early.

The first sound I hear on Christmas Day is Lorraine's murmurings. (She never cries.) I tuck her in bed with me and as I nurse her, I find myself wondering about the lonely old people in a home we recently visited. What kind of a day will they have? Will anyone see that something special is done for them? I have the fleeting idea of taking the baby to see them. Wouldn't they love to see her and touch her?

And what about those two dear people who lost both their sons three years ago? They were drowned when one tried to save the other. How painful Christmas must be as they think of past years. "Oh, dear God, who are we to have so much!"

As the boys call me, I try to shake off the melancholy. Andy's eyes are big as saucers when he realizes that "Santa did come." We all open our stockings; no, Lorraine chews hers. We have devotions around our big red Advent candle, breakfast, and then the excitement of opening presents, with the usual "before" and "after" snapshots of the living room. Wait till you see the "after" one this year—wall-to-wall papers, ribbons, chil-



dren, toys, one puppy, one cat, one mother in bathrobe with hand on head! Wow!

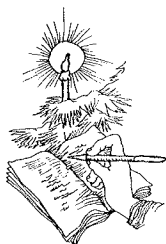
Oh, it was a lovely Christmas—"the best Christmas we ever had!"

Now it is two weeks later. The tree is stripped and out in the yard, stuck in a snowbank, as so many of us desert Christ as soon as His Birthday is over. Maybe this coming year, with God's help, we can do better.

Love to you both,  
Anne (Scovel Fitch)

## CHRISTMAS BAKING WITH A DIFFERENCE

*by Dixie Lee Clifford Scovel*



Christmas baking had always started early at our house. Along with dozens of krumenkaker (thin Norwegian cookies rolled into cornucopias to be filled with whipped cream and crushed fruits), there were tins of cookies, rich with butter, and loaves of dark fruit breads. All went into gift boxes for friends and neighbors.

This year was different. Six months before Christmas, our family gave up refined foods and decided to give nutrition and natural foods a whirl. All went well at first; we came through Thanksgiving dinner minus four butter-drenched courses and pumpkin pie.

But as Christmas drew near, my determination faltered. Our tradition of gift boxes was not easy to drop. But neither was our new way of eating.

Our compromise was a different contents for our boxes,

using—along with loaves of fresh whole wheat bread—the following recipes:

### FRUIT COOKIES

- ½ pound each
- sun-dried raisins
- natural figs
- sun-dried apricots
- walnut meats
- almond meats



Prepare fruit by removing seeds and stem ends. Put the fruits and nuts through a meat grinder with the coarsest cutter. Mix well. Form into a roll and wrap in wax paper. Refrigerate overnight. Slice into ¼-inch slices with a sharp knife.



### A DIFFERENT SUGAR COOKIE

- 1 cup butter
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 tablespoon vanilla
- ½ cup wheat germ
- 1 cup ground walnuts
- 1 cup whole wheat pastry flour
- 1 cup soy flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt



Cream together the butter and sugar. Add eggs, vanilla, wheat germ and walnuts. Mix well. Sift together the remaining dry ingredients. Stir only enough to mix well. Form into a roll. Wrap in wax paper and refrigerate overnight. Cut into

¼-inch slices and place on baking sheet covered with foil. Bake 8 to 10 minutes at 350°.

Before baking, the tops of the cookies may be sprinkled with coconut, chopped citron or candied pineapple, chopped nut meats, sesame or anise seeds. Press lightly into dough with a fork.

The  
Spirit  
of  
Christmas  
Yet To Come

# EIGHTEEN

What will the Christmas of the future be like?

In no time at all, Christmas cards will become obsolete, not only because, ecologically, they use up too many trees and pile up waste, but because they will no longer be needed.

Almost any year now, we will program our home computers to give us a print-off of the names of those we most want to remember at this blessed time of year. We will choose a quiet hour, perhaps our listening-to-music hour, and by new methods of extrasensory perception, tune in on several of our friends and eventually, all of them at once. We will think them our love, feel their greetings return and flow into us. We will rise refreshed and conscious of how great a blessing friendship is.

How different from the frustration and exhaustion of addressing cards, knowing that time is running out and we're only at the "S's"! But even in these backward times of having technology and not knowing how to use it, there is still a way. We

may not have a family computer or a high degree of ESP, but we do have prayer and thought transference. Perhaps we should try getting out the address book and going down the list, a few pages a day, in restful, loving intercession for those we care about. Their Christmas and ours would be filled with peace and through all the days of Christmas, we would feel each other's presence.

But what of the future Future? Let's travel farther with the Spirit of Christmas Yet to Come and tune in on the young son of a Future family.

"Will there be snow?" we ask, and hear a voice reply:

"Oh, yes, we always have snow. We have it piped in from the Arctic regions by the same system of pipes that brings us our baths from the geysers, our body lotions from our favorite perfumers, our drinking water from our favorite springs. On the night before Christmas, we all stand in our patios and let the snow blow over us. It feels good having the snow sprayed over our bodies. We take up handfuls of it and throw it at each other and have lots of fun. We always look forward to Snow Night. Father and Mother say the snow used to be colder when they were young; then, on Snow Night, you could make it into balls or even, if it came fast enough, into snowmen. They say the Arctic Cap is melting and someday we won't have any snow at all. I wish I could make a snowman just once before that happens."

"Do you have Christmas trees?"

"Trees? Oh, now I remember. The Sage told us all about them. They were green and prickly—some of them were prickly, the ones they used to decorate with colored balls. But that was before primitive man of the twentieth century denuded the hillsides by cutting them all down. The Sage told us that the idea of the tree may be the reason why the Atomic Kaleidoscopic Pictures at Christmas time are apt to come into our minds in cone shapes."

"Pictures? Into your minds?"

"Well, they *come* into our minds, then we all work on them together, arrange the colors and the designs in the color tubes, then we flash them across the picture wall, changing them to bring out our ideas best. We love their movement and the way the light and color combine in unusual forms we never really planned, so that everything we create goes on creating itself and becomes more beautiful than we'd thought it would be. Of course, we have to meditate first and feel the Divine Spirit flowing through us. Some of us are better than others at Wall Pictures because some are closer to the Divine Mind."

"Do you have other Christmas pictures besides the ones with cones?"

"Oh, yes. We have all kinds of pictures, not only for Christmas, but for other days, almost all the days."

"Doesn't it take a lot of time to make them?"

"What is time?"

"Never mind. Tell us more about the pictures."

"Our family is working on one now. It's going to be on the Great Star, the one we hear about after the Snow on Christmas Eve when we gather in our love group to listen to the Sage tell us about when the Star appeared in the sky."

"What happened?"

"It's a strange story about the birth of a child in the manner children used to be born—in pain and many times in poverty—in a land where there were living things called animals, that watched his birth. The telling seems to draw us very close to one another."

"How long will it take you to make the Star picture?"

"Until it is finished. We want our telling of the Star, through the picture, to bring the creative feeling to all who see it. If we do it well enough, perhaps He-Who-Leads will choose it to hang in the Science Building to inspire those who work there. It's the building in which our uncle used to work."

"Your uncle? Where is he now?"

"He's helping the colonists on Mercury to make their last adjustments to their new atmosphere. Uncle was one of the men who found a way to regulate the atmosphere on all the planets. Mercury was the most difficult, but now that one is working well, too."

"Does he ever get back to Earth?"

"Of course. Distance is no problem anymore. But Uncle doesn't like Earth much. He thinks we're awfully backward here. He doesn't like our Wall Pictures, especially what we've shown him of our first attempts on the Star picture. 'You don't know anything about stars,' says Uncle. 'Stars have to be seen from far away, as the Wise Men saw them.'"

"Wise Men?"

"It's a Christmas Telling that is told on Mercury—about three kings who brought gifts to a little Boy that was born. Wouldn't it be wonderful if it turned out to be the same Baby who came to bring peace so long ago? The very one our Sage tells us about?"

"Perhaps it is."

"Uncle is sure that it is He. This I know—we feel the same warm glow inside us when we hear both stories."

"Do you ever travel to the other planets?"

"No, but someday I'd like to go to the cities under the sea, where most of Earth's inhabitants live now."

"Why isn't *your* family there?"

"Well, you see, our grandfathers were among those who could never accommodate to gill-breathing, so our family has remained on Earth. But we hear a lot about the Undersea People. We know they don't have snow there; that Wall Pictures are never used because the houses are all made of glass and the ever-changing beauties of the ocean floor are open for all to see.

"At Christmas time there are Tellings there, too, of course. Underwater sound vibrations from their Sages are translated



by a system which turns them into words. It's all done right there in their homes, so they don't have to go even the short distance to where their Sage lives. But I'd miss the traveling to see the Sage, and I'd want to see his face during the Telling. Those under the sea say they like to be together in their own homes as a family for the Telling. So they gather from their work cities and from their play cities and listen to the story of a people who were on Earth long ago and who loved the Divine Spirit who walked on Earth then. After He left them, these people lived underground in catacombs; but strange as it may seem, their symbol was a small lake fish.

"Father would like to try again to see if he could now adapt to gill-breathing. But Mother says, 'If we go, who will feed the birds?'"

## **Roads Still Lead to Bethlehem**

We, your children,  
have never heard a sleighbell.  
We have never gone  
over-the-river-and-through-the-woods  
to Grandmother's house.  
Ours is not your generation.

But good heavy-duty tires  
pull us through the same snow  
to places of our own  
where we sing of ancient things.

We have never decorated a tree with popcorn  
nor felt the one orange  
in the toe of a stocking.

But we have seen beauty, have known want.  
And though the way for us is uncharted,  
we follow a star.

# NINETEEN

Meanwhile, we are here, living on Earth in a time which has been hopelessly bad but is getting hopefully better. However inadequate our solutions, the vast majority of the world's people now know that, for settling disputes, war is as obsolete as dueling. Our thinking and our planning is firmly set in the direction of "Peace on earth, goodwill among men."

We are willing at last to listen to our own shepherds keeping watch over their flocks on the plains of the West and are at least beginning an attempt to right the wrongs we have done to these Indian Americans from whom we took the country. We can no longer say that one of the three Wise Men, inquiring where the young Child lay, would be turned away from the Inn today.

And thousands of our young people (some say the figure is nearer the millions) are finding that the Man who was born in Bethlehem has the power to redeem their every situation,

including loosening them from the captivity of drugs. (It is interesting that some of them call themselves Jesus People—a direct translation of the word Christians, the term used in derision of the same group years ago in Antioch.) For all our present sophistication, we are nearer to the first Christians than we were.

But we are not that up-to-date on how to celebrate the Birthday of this Man, Christ Jesus. Our preparations for it reduce the nation's population to frenzied desperation. We worry over how the piled-up bills will be paid, are frustrated because of lack of time to do all we make ourselves do. Instead of being renewed by Christmas, we collapse, a quivering pulp of fatigue. Ask any sales person, any airlines employee, any mother, any couple who have worked to within a few hours of Christmas Eve and must be back on the job the morning of the 26th.

In China Christmas was easier and it was harder than this. It was easier because it was simply a Holy Day for the church. It was harder because, for most of the twenty-one years there, we were in the midst of war. I would worry for months in fear that there would be no gifts for the children, or that, having them, the house would be searched again and the gifts confiscated. We lost other things during the war—two complete households of everything we owned, including furniture; but we never lost the Christmas presents. I thanked God fervently each Christmas morning when we wakened to find the tree, the presents, our home, just as we'd hoped they would be on Christmas and not bombed out of existence.

The difficulties brought a blessing that has carried over. I still begin to pray for Christmas early in the summer—that all our preparations will be according to what God wants our Christmas to be. The urgency and the fear are gone, now. (How I wish that could be said by every mother in the world!) It is pleasant to pray for the preparations without fear—that we will spend the holiday where He wants us to be;

that we will be guided to buy the right things for the right people, something that will be pure joy to look at or to use.

If this prayer brings no other balm, it at least spares you that awful moment when the presents are all wrapped and ready to be placed under the tree and you *know* you've given too little and nothing seems right for anybody. "Well, I prayed," you can say to yourself. "I prayed and I've tried my best. Nobody can do more." You can go to bed and not have to run out to buy a lot more stuff you can't afford.

Some year *soon* I'm going back to the old China plan of buying in the summer and setting the deadline for having all gifts wrapped by Thanksgiving Day instead of the night before Christmas. With that much behind me, I can enjoy the baking and the decorating. And, knowing that everything is ready, I can feel to the full the beauty of our church's Christmas Eve candlelight service. I can pray for each child and grandchild during the Communion without the intrusion of cataloguing what order to follow as soon as that last hymn is sung and I can hurry Fred away from all the people he has to see and get busy on what is yet to be done.

Meanwhile, back at the Christmas cards . . .

Until we have two-way ESP, this is the only way most of us keep in touch with our friends. But I am convinced that Christmas cards are self-proliferating. When I mentioned addressing six hundred, Faith said, "So that's where Carl gets the feeling he has to send a card to every person he meets on an airplane!"

Right, Faith. Sorry.

But I enjoy receiving Christmas cards, too—even those without a personal message. Myrtle Cray, while we were in India, gave me the idea of choosing special ones to use in making small arrangements for the top of a bookcase, the corner of a table or desk. Each year I begin with a card

depicting the Annunciation, and put with it a candle and a small ceramic angel or a tiny carved wooden one. As the season progresses, on through the Birth, the Shepherds, and the Wise Men, I change the cards and the decorated candles to match colors, adding a carved wooden reindeer which Fred once brought me from Tübingen, or some other small treasure such as a bell. Sometimes I make several arrangements, upstairs and down. I also use Christmas cards and other beautiful ones, such as those from museums, for bookmarks all year long. I use our cards, I enjoy them, but oh, that list! How to choose one friend to cross out! Technology, hurry! Help! Six hundred Think-O-Grams, please.

One of our friends solved her card problem by enlarging her birthday list. She liked spreading out her silent conversations with friends to cover a whole year and thought we would enjoy the card on our own day instead of amid the plethora of Christmas. I like her idea.

And I would cast a vote for printed letters at some time other than Christmas, too. There isn't leisure enough, really, even to dash through them. Over seventy of them coming in at once, each one from a dear friend whose news you've been looking forward to hearing—here it is in your lap and you can't take time to read it!

It occurs to me that spreading birthday gifts over the year might help some families to solve the too-many-for-Christmas problem. Not ours! We have nine birthdays in the immediate family between November 29 and January 10. I once said to Judy and Vicki, "Now, girls, whenever a boy wants you to go out with him, ask first when his birthday is. If he says December, just say, 'Sorry.'" Jim Harris, Vicki's husband, barely got in under the wire, November 29.

I sometimes give "un-birthday, un-Christmas" presents, but our friend, Muriel Thorne, does the loveliest thing of all—she gives Advent presents. I can't think of another time of year

when it is so much fun to receive a gift. You're just beginning to get excited about Christmas and feel you can hardly wait for its surprises and suddenly, right then, you find a package in the mailbox! Muriel has a talent for finding appropriate and unusual things for her friends. I know she shops all year long. She once gave us our own gargoyle on the Washington Cathedral. Someday we are going down there just to see it. Usually she gives us things from her travels—an olive-wood bell from Bethlehem, two exquisite cups and saucers decorated with dainty sprigs of holly from England, a Danish cheese knife perfect for slicing and of good design, an unusual ceramic angel she found in a shop in Alexandria. And the pin, which is perfect on the lapel of my old green suit, I bring out every year to wear to church on the first Sunday in Advent. It is an authentic reproduction of the Angel Gabriel, Flemish, fifteenth century, from the original in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. (where Muriel was formerly a lecturer). It is long after Epiphany before I can bear to put my angel back into its box.

Perhaps by simplifying our last-minute preparations or spreading them out over the year, we may find the leisure to give thought to new ways of celebrating the Birthday of Christ. We are caught in the same old wheel, year after year. For instance, from the standpoint of ecology, something has to be done *soon* about Christmas trees. We have better uses for the comparatively few acres of land left to us.

We might begin Christmas on Arbor Day and, having asked permission of the town fathers, gather the neighbors together and plant evergreens along our sidewalks, or in the town park, to be decorated by us all at Christmas time. We might even make a Christmas mini-park. Or, we might as a family plant a small evergreen in a tub each year to decorate for our own use the following Christmas; then plant it outside the next

Arbor Day, with a new one in the tub for the coming Christmas, and so on. If we planted a tree each year for each member of the family, our clan could reforest a hill in no time; and have our inside Christmas trees besides.

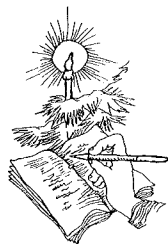
Or, we might try some secret tree planting as a year-round Christmas gift to a shut-in—say a dogwood in the side yard near a window. This, too, could be done on Arbor Day, with perhaps a note mentioning it, in some way, at Christmas time.

A couple we know decorate an outside evergreen near their living-room window for the winter birds. They hang it with apples, bright red and blue bags of woven string filled with peanuts or suet. These “decorations” attract the cardinals, nuthatches, blue jays, sparrows, purple finches, titmouses, and chickadees, making a veritable carrousel of a Christmas tree.

Many of us will want some living green inside our homes at Christmas. Cousins of ours in Beacon, New York, had a lovely planted bowl given them by their daughter-in-law, which they showed us with delight.



Fred and I look forward each year to our own daughter-in-law's gift—Faith's partridge berry wreath:



### A PARTRIDGE BERRY WREATH

Tall pines rose skyward overhead,  
And dropped soft needles for my bed,  
Where, glossy green and cheery red,  
My lowly fruit and leaves were spread.  
Now in a wreath I come to you,  
As living friends are wont to do,  
My Christmas wishes to renew,  
Accept please my devotion too.



Will keep indefinitely. Put in shallow dish of water.  
Moisten top occasionally. Soak overnight once a week.

My grandfather, Hollis Webster, wrote this poem and had the cards made up for his wife, Helen Noyes, to accompany the small wreaths she made at Christmas time to give as gifts

of cheer. But the cheer was in the making as well as in the receiving and this, too, she gave to her friends.

As a child, I remember the dining room at Christmas time, smelling of woods and swamps, the dark wood sideboard covered with greenery, the brass samovar poking its cover through the cut branches; the dining-room table filled with cut sprigs of yew, spruce, and cedar, and with little bowls and trays of pine cones, gold-painted seed pods, partridge berries, black elder and juniper berries; spools of green twine, mosses in low waterfilled-dishes—what soothing confusion it all was!

This room was always cozily but expandably full. Greenery and people got pushed around with equally loving goodwill, to make room for more people or hot tea for a caller, in from the cold, or bowls of just-made applesauce for children in need of a break. Someone would move a chair and then you could squeeze past the sideboard where a little place was carefully cleared for you at the edge of the table. An aunt or maybe a neighbor who had just learned wreath-making would help you find a piece of wire, slide a few greens in your direction, then let you forage about for whatever you chose to put in your wreath.

I work a little more quickly now, after many years of this seasonal ritual, but it was very slow-going at first. This is how I was taught to make



## A PARTRIDGE BERRY WREATH

- I. Gather sphagnum moss, reindeer moss (really a lichen), partridge berries, and a little princess pine or other soft greenery in the fall or early winter. The berries should

be gathered after the first cold snap has turned them red and before it is so deep in winter that the birds and deer have eaten them.

All these come from the northern piney woods with acid soil. The sphagnum moss grows best in moist areas; the reindeer moss likes the sides of rocks and grows taller as you go farther north.

The partridge berries grow in piney woods throughout New England. To collect them is arduous fun. You find the berries in patches under, and poking through, the pines and snow of the forest floor. With your fingers, break off four or five inches at the end of the growth. Try to get stems with berries, but stems without berries can be useful, too, as filler. Please don't pull up the root. It is needed for next year's supply.

In addition to the three basic ingredients—a moss (sphagnum) to hold moisture, a lichen (reindeer moss) for white color, and the berry sprigs—it's fun to have a few extra bits from the woods to tuck into your wreath.

There are three very important things to remember when you go:

1. Check the use and ownership of the property where you're going to pick.
2. It will be close to, if not in, hunting season, so wear some red or orange to warn hunters, just in case. If the berries are growing there, it is probably good deer country.
3. Dress warmly and wear boots or rubbers. Take a piece of old rug or something waterproof to kneel on. It can get very cold, squatting in damp, shady woods.

The greenery you have collected will keep in a cool

place for several weeks if it is made just barely moist and sealed in a plastic bag.

Now back to the second step in the *directions*:

- II. Soak the mosses for several minutes or longer, till they become spongy. Take a piece of copper wire long enough to circle into your wreath when it is finished. (Do not circle it now.) Take an egg-sized piece of damp sphagnum moss and roll it between your hands till it's about the width of your thumb (as you used to do with modeling clay to make "snakes"). Using one hand, hold the sphagnum moss as a bed along the wire; lay bits of berry sprigs, reindeer moss, and princess pine on top of it, securing them with that same thumb until, with your free hand, you have wound string over the stem to hold them in place. Lay on a bit at a time, winding with the string as you go, working down the length of the wire. Arrange the tops of your greenery as you want the wreath to look. Don't worry about straggling stems, just hold them with the sphagnum moss as you go along and let them serve as bedding for the coming tops.

When it is long enough to make the size of a wreath you want, bend it into a circle and twist the ends of the wire together. As you do this, you will probably have to cut off the remaining stem ends or sew them into the moss. Bare and bunchy spots can be covered by gently pushing some of the greens to close the gap or by sewing a few sprigs into place with thread and needle.

- III. Have fun; relax and enjoy the smell and feel of the wreath as you work. What it does for you is more important than what you do for it.
- IV. To keep the wreath fresh, it should be set in a shallow dish of water so the moss will remain soft. (A soup plate works rather well.) Every few days either spray the top

or soak the wreath upside down in a bowl of deeper water for a few minutes. Once a week submerge it completely in cold water and let it soak overnight.

Christmas is much more than this and Christmases have included much less, but making wreaths in my grandparents' home, in my parents' and now in our own, has become a very special part of the season for me.

Faith Greeley Scovel

*Boston, Massachusetts*

## TWENTY

Meanwhile, what about the commercialism of Christmas?

Carl once wrote in a King's Chapel Bulletin for Advent:

"'Happy New Year' is an appropriate greeting for this season, since Advent marks the beginning of the Christian year. The church has its own year and the church has its own sense of time, indifferent to the calendar year and the fiscal year and even the commercial year. (The commercial Christmas now begins, I am told, just after Halloween.) The church keeps its own time, deliberately out of step with store and state and season, and this deliberate 'mistiming' shows that the church has its own identity and its own authority, independent of the voices of culture.

"We would do well *not* to cry and complain about the commercialization of Christmas, especially if we purchase our gifts and decorations at this time of year as everyone else does. . . . Commercialization cannot hurt our celebration of Christ's birth and His significance, so long as *we* do not con-

fuse the two. The commercial Christmas (perhaps we should use the proper pagan name, 'Yuletide,' will not affect our worship or devotions, so long as *we* keep our sense of what we are about when we celebrate the Christian Christmas.

"We solemnize our expectation of God's kingdom; we give thanks for God's inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ: we think upon and celebrate these things. We begin anew. Happy New Year!"

And a Happy New Year to all you who are behind the counters, driving delivery trucks, trudging the postal routes, answering the mail orders—all you who are involved in the commercialization of Christmas. It would be folly to wish you a Merry Christmas. Christmas to you must be a numb, exhausted body carried around by two aching legs and two sore feet. And I say, "A Happier New Year than you have ever had before," because this present situation does not have to be and must not be.

Our methods of shopping for Christmas are obsolete. Stores are inadequately built to handle the increase of population and its resultant flow of traffic through aisles in front of and behind counters which were built for our grandmothers. Such crowding brings out the worst in us shoppers. Our shouts of impatience drown the *God-Rest-You-Merry's* of the piped-in music.

It does not have to be so. A little thought and planning can leave you, the downtrodden-by-Christmas, with the relatively few who actually enjoy a last-minute rush. The rest of us will keep our own time, "deliberately out of step with store and state and season." Time does not control us; we control time by setting our priorities, by choosing what we will do with time. It can't be that difficult to shop early.

Have you ever noticed that immediately after Christmas, ideas for gifts seem to flood into your mind? Ads in magazines leap out at you. "That Teddy Bear will be just the thing for

Lorrie," we say. "I must remember it." I, for one, never do.

After Christmas, I made out a list of those to whom we usually give presents. Now, when I see such an ad, I vow to order at once, or clip it, label it for whomever, and put it in a pile until I have enough money to buy the article. And I think I'll stash away a few extra dollars in what I shall call my Christmas purse in case I see something while shopping that would take one more name off the list for later. If there still remain a few friends unprovided for, say by Halloween, I resolve to think through what I want *before* I go on my shopping expedition. So much for New Year's resolutions.

But if I waver, I shall keep saying to myself, "This does not have to be and I am the one to help to change it." For I rebel against our injustice to those who must work before, during, and after Christmas. I am perfectly serious about such people starting a CRUSADE FOR AN 8-DAY CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY! Until this is accomplished, why not, as individuals, declare your own Christmas week, say in April, the month in which some scholars believe Christ was born? It might be fun to think up new ways of decorating for that time of year. Trim a tree on the patio. Decorate for Christmas inside with the colors madonna blue, white, and gold, instead of the December reds and greens.

A Christmas tree for the center of the table could be made of white nylon net balls, for instance. For each ball, buy  $\frac{1}{4}$  yd. net, which comes folded double on the bolt.

The directions are:

Cut in 3 three-inch-wide strips

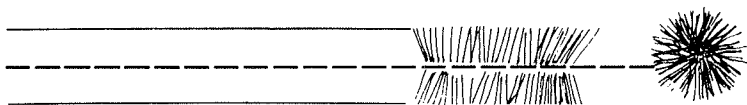
Lay them one on top of the other, making 3 double strips of the folded nylon or six layers deep

Shirr them together down the middle of the strips with a fine mercerized crotcheting cotton

Then pull the thread tight to draw the material up into a fluffy ball and tie securely



Sew a ribbon with a small plastic flower into the top for added decoration (optional)



Set up in a pyramid, the balls would make a lovely white Christmas tree. Invite friends in for dinner. They'll think you are crazy, celebrating Christmas at this time of year, and will be sure of it when you give each one of them a fluffy nylon ball to take home to use for scouring pots and pans. I didn't believe it would work until I tried one; but it did. They are even on sale for that purpose in some stores.

Why not set a date and give yourself a wonderful present—like a cruise to . . . would you like to try the Holy Land? It might make a difference in your celebration of Christmas forever after. If you decide to go, do read Paul L. Maier's book, *The First Christmas* (Harper & Row), and *In the Steps of the Master* by H. V. Morton (Dodd, Mead & Co.) which Muriel Thorne gave us for Lent one year. If you can't afford the trip, treat yourself to the books anyway.

My heart goes out especially to clerks in large department stores. You could take mini-Christmas-breaks during lunch hours, I suppose, to sit in a quiet library or church, or go to a museum, even if you had time for only one picture. I think I'd choose a favorite, see if I could buy a postcard of it at the museum shop, and carry it in my pocket to look at when the going got rough.

I once knew a nurse who, when things piled too high, would buy herself a new perfume, put a drop or two on a handker-

chief, and take a whiff now and then to remind her that "the world *can* be beautiful, fragrant, and lovely."

Is it possible for you salespeople to realize what a vital part you play in bringing joy to hundreds at this blessed time of year? Can you feel, throughout the store, the joy and glory of Christmas? Or are you so tired you cannot even pretend that Christmas is wonderful and you are about to give the woman tearing at your sleeve "one big fist sandwich" (to quote Judy)?

The true meaning of Christmas has nothing to do with the mob of faces swimming before your eyes. It cannot touch the real you, who are alone, in a simple hut, with the Holy Family. If we have taken this away from you, how can we celebrate Christmas ourselves?

He who knew what it was like to be hemmed in by crowds, came to redeem the world. And that includes department stores.

There will always be those of us who, at one time or another, will have to work on Christmas Day. Having been a nurse and having a doctor for a husband, I know it well. I know, too, how the Day can be gloriously brightened when one is shown appreciation and concern.

Someday, when the picky little worries start picking and one needs to think of something to take them off one's mind, it might be fun to try to write a few dialogues for those who help us to keep Christmas but cannot do so themselves. I have one in mind that I haven't had the courage to try out yet, for fear of a forced sojourn in a mental hospital. It is called:

## **HOW TO MAKE A SALESGIRL DROP IN HER TRACKS**

*or*

### **Show a Clerk a Miracle**

She: Which one do you want?

Me: I don't know. Which one do *you* like?

She: This one.

Me: Do you really like this one? Would you wear a scarf like this yourself?

She: Yes, it's my favorite color.

Me: Okay, I'll take it. And I want it gift wrapped.

She (*coming back with gift*): Do you have a card for it?

Me: Thanks, but I won't need one. Here (*handing her the gift*), take this home and open it when you wake up on Christmas afternoon.

(*Disappear into crowd while she is still stunned*)



One such real-life dialogue used to take place in Fred's home and I recall hearing it again the Christmas of 1952, when we had our last Christmas celebration in America before leaving for India. It was at the home of our cousins, The Reverend George H. Allen, Jr., and his wife, Harriet, at the manse in Bath, New York:

Cousin Harriet: George, where are you going? You haven't finished opening your presents.

Cousin George: I'll be right back. I want to call the operator before I forget it.

Cousin George (*on the phone*): Good morning, Operator. I just want to wish you a Merry Christmas and to thank you for working today so we can have the pleasure of calling our family and friends. (*Silence*) No, Operator, I don't want to place a call. I just want to wish you a Merry Christmas. (*Returns, chuckling*)

One of us: What did she say?

Cousin George: She said, "Thank you, the same to you."

Cousin Harriet: What else did she say, George?

Cousin George (*still chuckling*): Just what they always say

every year: "In all the times I've had to work on Christmas Day, no one has ever done this before."



Cousin George is no longer with us here on earth, but Harriet continues to mother (and sister!) us all. If you were to ask our children, "Who is the best cook in the immediate family," without question they would answer, "Aunt Harriet."

"*Cousin* Harriet sounds so distant," they all agreed. "Can't we call her 'Aunt' instead?"

She is much closer to us than cousin *or* aunt. She would be the matriarch of the family, if she were at all matriarchal. She is, rather, our children's eighty-seven-year-old contemporary.

Here is one of Cousin Harriet's recipes which we all like very much. I serve it with cold ham and a salad on Christmas Eve, or for a late supper on Christmas night. It's a good change from the fowl we usually have for Christmas dinner:

### SCALLOPED OYSTERS

- 1 pint oysters
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup bread, crumbled loosely in *small* pieces
- 1 cup saltine crackers, also crumbled loosely
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup melted butter
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{3}$  teaspoon pepper
- 4 tablespoons oyster liquid (about)
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup rich milk or cream



Rinse oysters just a little under the cold-water faucet. Set them into a drainer cup for awhile where quite a bit of the heavier liquid will collect. Mix the bread and crackers with the melted butter. In a shallow baking dish, put a layer of the buttered crumbs. Cover with the oysters and seasoning. Add the rest of the crumbs and sprinkle lightly with the oyster liquid and cream. Bake, uncovered, in hot oven ( $425^{\circ}$ ) for 30 to 35 minutes until brown.

## TWENTY-ONE

Meanwhile, what of Santa Claus?

Santa was not part of the Chinese or Indian celebrations of Christmas. It was strange to come back to the United States and find the major emphasis on His Jollyness. As one friend said, "It's all very well for you to talk about Christmas being Jesus' Birthday, but remember, our children here know very little about that side of it, unless they happen to be members of that small minority who go to Sunday school. The Christmas story is no longer read from the Bible in public schools; the carols aren't sung. The children do hear them on television, of course, but they are just another song like 'Rudolph, the Red-nosed Reindeer' and 'White Christmas.'"

Do you believe in Santa Claus? I was ten years old before the question even entered my mind. I believed in him because I knew that my parents would never lie to me. One day when my mother was brushing my long hair in front of her mirror,

she asked, "Myra, do you mean to say you *still* believe in Santa Claus?"

"Of course," I told her.

She threw back her head and laughed one of her long, beautiful laughs—"the kind of a laugh Santa Claus has," I thought. Their handwriting was similar, too.

Santa is just as real as elves and fairies and leprechauns and hobbits, and everybody believes in *them*. Santa is the jolly old elf of Christmas surprises. He comes and you never see him. He leaves the gifts under the tree; sometimes he signs them, sometimes he doesn't. Sometimes the packages only say, "Guess Who?" You know he's been there because the piece of cake you leave for him is always eaten. Why, Santa Claus wouldn't miss celebrating Jesus' Birthday by making other people happy for all the snow at the North Pole. Santa Claus is the Spirit-of-Christmas-Giving.

Making other people happy—perhaps this is the test of what is a right thing to do for Christmas. Will our preparations bring joy and renewal in our own lives? For surely one way to *give* happiness at Christmas is to be happy ourselves (especially mothers!). Will what we do bring joy and renewal to others? If so, we may find those around us drawing closer to the message of the Manger.

And the dear old saint has given me a way to entertain our grandchildren while talking to my husband, two sons, two daughters-in-law, a daughter, a son-in-law, and a neighbor:

(*Aside, to the children:*) Bring me a piece of white paper, the scissors, and a box of crayons.

Children: How big do you want the paper?

Me: Typewriter-size. You'll find some in my study, the old paper you can draw on. Remember?

Children: Come on, I know where it is. On the bottom shelf of that little white bench near her red chair.

Me: And the scissors and crayons are in the top drawer of the table by the window. Right-hand side.



## HOW TO MAKE A CIRCLE OF SANTAS

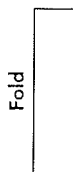
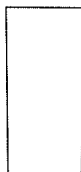
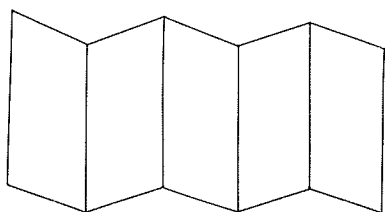
Cut a sheet of  $8\frac{1}{2}$ "  $\times$  11" typewriter paper down the middle lengthwise (This will provide two sets of Santas.)

Fold one of the strips in 2-inch-wide folds, folding first one way, then the other, as you would for a fan

If you need to, cut off a piece from the last fold to make it even with the others

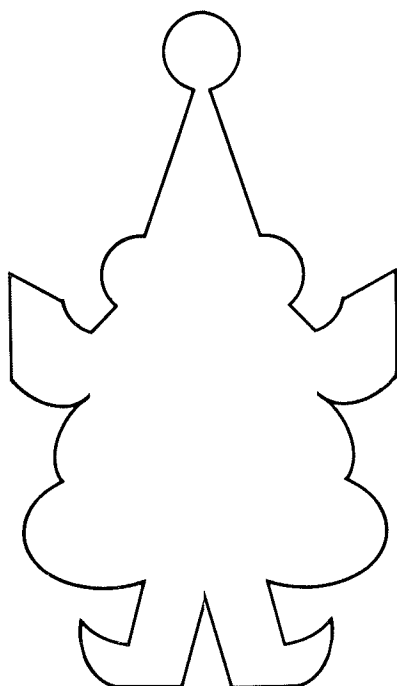
Hold folds  
together

Fold again



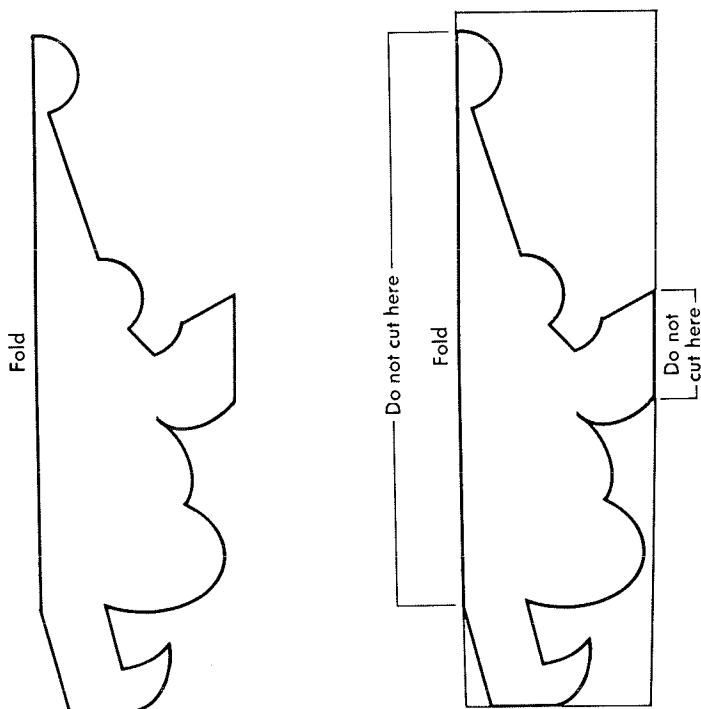


Trace off this pattern on another  
piece of paper and cut out

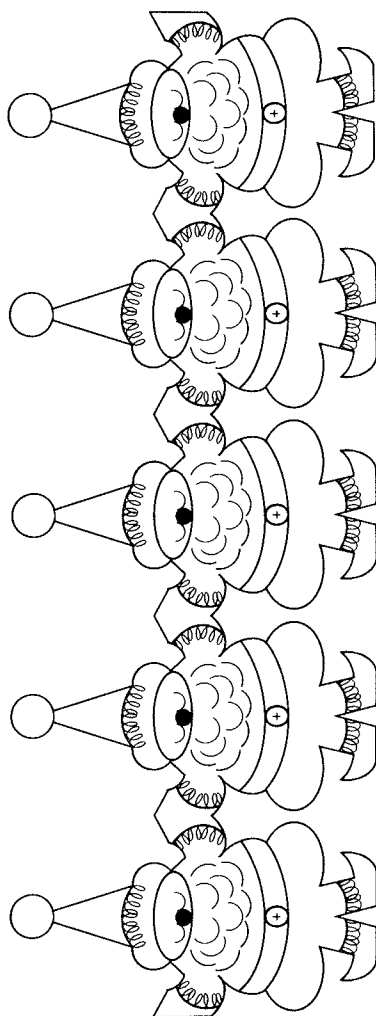


Fold it down the middle

Place fold of Santa  
on fold of paper  
and trace around it



Cut out Santa, being careful not to cut the hands where  
they meet the edge of the folded paper  
Open the folds



Draw in the face, beard, belt, etc., letting the children color them to suit their fancy

Leave them in a row, or paste the first and the last hands together to make a circle

# TWENTY-TWO

## The Christmas Story that Should Never Have to be Told

I was in a large room, I will not say where. Everything about the room was satisfying—its proportions, its furnishings, its atmosphere. I liked this room, lit now by the dazzling sun of Christmas morning.

Gathered around a glowing tree were those who loved me. They made it seem as if the whole celebration was meant for me alone. One of them came up and laid a present in my lap. It was a small thing, not worth much, but I liked it and expressed my thanks. There were other gifts—some I didn't like at all, some I thought I would never use and found later that I could not do without them. All these gifts I accepted as if they were my due and I responded with the necessary gratitude.

Then one came with a gift which I knew had cost him everything he had. I could guess what it might be, but I didn't really know and had no desire to find out.

"I don't want it," I said. "I don't want your gift at all."

I knew that if I looked up, I would see the hurt in his eyes, but I didn't even care enough to look up.

"Please take it," he said. "It is everything you've always wanted and never thought you'd have."

I might have felt his pleading, sensed the deep disappointment, but I didn't. His sacrifice meant nothing to me.

"Please take it," he said again, and knew at last that all he'd planned to make this the happiest Christmas of my life had been in vain.

"Maybe some other time," I replied. "I don't really need it now. I'll let you know when I want it."

Was it a dream or did it really happen?

It is happening every day. We accept the beautiful room, our world, its dazzling sun, its healing rain—our environment perfected to meet our every need. We accept all the smaller gifts, which are not really small—the roof over our heads, the love of those around us, the push-button conveniences that leave us free to do whatever we choose—these we take as our due.

But we have been offered a greater gift, a gift whose cost we cannot estimate—the one gift that is "everything you've always wanted and never thought you'd have."

Blessed are we if we accept the Gift of Christmas. As Vicki has said, "Christ was born! . . . Welcome, Saviour."

## CHRISTMAS WISH

*God give you blessings at Christmas time—  
stars for your darkness, sun for your day,  
light on the path as you search for the way,  
and a mountain to climb.*

*God grant you courage this coming year,  
fruit for your striving, friends as you roam,  
joy in your labor, love in your home,  
and a summit to clear.*



*With love,  
Myra Scovel*

## **FAMILY CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS**

## **FAMILY CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS** continued



## **FAMILY CHRISTMAS RECIPES**

## RECIPES continued

## RECIPES continued

## CHRISTMAS CRAFTS

## **CRAFTS continued**

## CHRISTMAS ART AND POEMS

**ART AND POEMS continued**

## ART AND POEMS continued

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